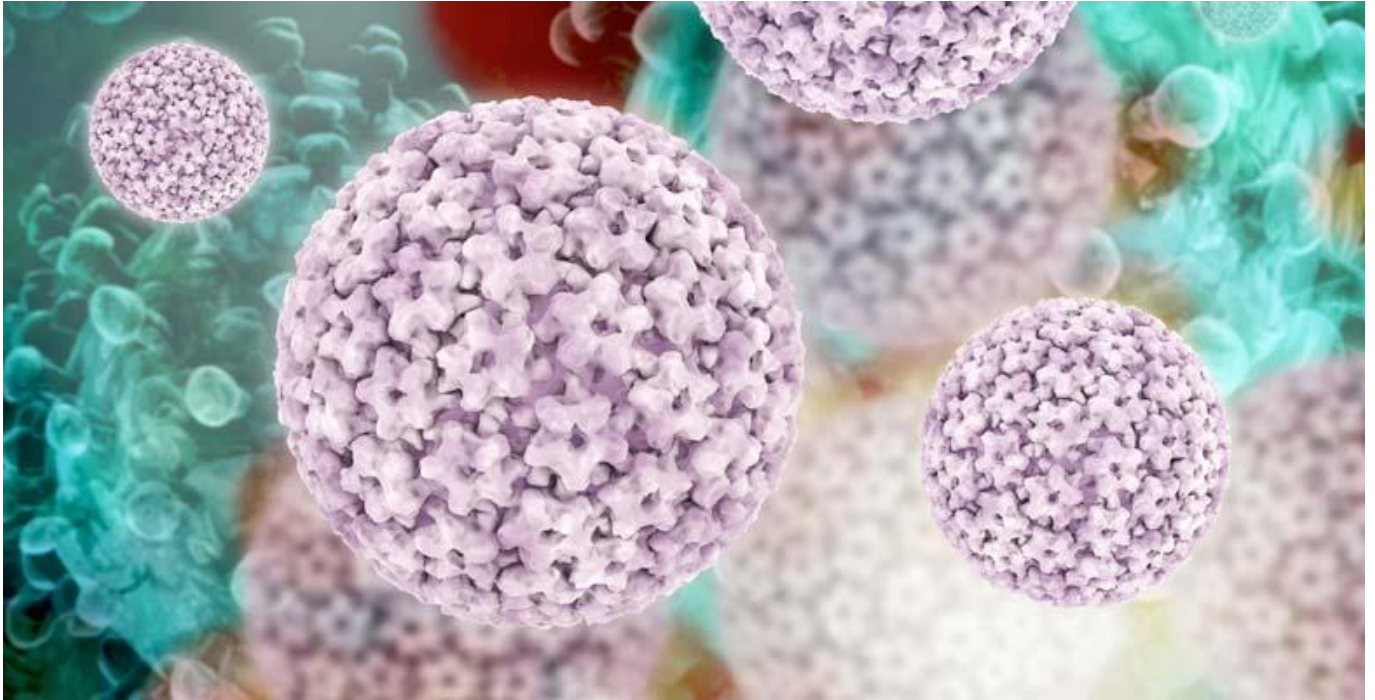


# Genital warts symptoms & treatment



## FAST FACTS

- Genital warts are caused by a virus that can be passed on through close genital contact, including sex without a condom.
- They look like small lumps or growths and are usually found around the penis, vagina, anus or upper thighs.
- If you think you might have genital warts, it's important to have them checked by a healthcare professional.
- The warts themselves can be treated and removed, but the virus that causes them can't be cured.
- The best way to prevent genital warts is to use condoms and dental dams for sex.

## What are genital warts?

Genital warts are small, raised, usually painless growths. They are caused by the [human papilloma virus \(HPV\)](#) which can be passed on through sex without a condom. There are over 100 different strains of HPV. The strain of HPV that causes genital warts is different from the strain that causes genital cancers, such as cervical cancer. The HPV that causes warts isn't linked to cancer and doesn't cause any more serious health problems. The warts themselves can be treated and will clear.

## What are the symptoms of genital warts?

Genital warts can appear as a single wart or as multiple warts in a cluster.

Symptoms include:

- one or more small, flesh-coloured or grey painless growths or lumps around your vagina, penis, anus or upper thighs
- itching or bleeding from your genitals or anus
- a change to your normal flow of pee (for example, sideways), that doesn't go away.

Be aware that the warts may be difficult to notice if they are internal (inside the vagina or anus) and that many people with the strain of HPV that causes genital warts will not develop any symptoms or know that they have it.

Symptoms of genital warts can appear weeks, months or years after you were in contact with the virus that causes them.

If you have symptoms of genital warts it's important to visit a health clinic to have them checked.

## How do you get genital warts?

Genital warts can be passed on through [vaginal](#) or [anal](#) sex without a condom and by sharing sex toys. The virus is transmitted through close genital contact, which means that you can get and pass on warts if you touch genitals with someone, even if you don't have penetrative sex or ejaculate (cum).

Although it's rare, genital warts can also be passed on through oral sex and affect the mouth and throat.

You can only get genital warts from someone else who has the virus, but be aware that not everyone will know if they have it. If the warts are internal someone may not notice them and people can pass on the virus even if they don't have any symptoms.

You can't get genital warts from kissing, hugging, swimming pools, sharing towels or cutlery.

If a woman has genital warts while pregnant, there is a risk that she could pass them on to her baby at birth. This isn't very common, but it's important that pregnant women seek advice from a healthcare worker if they notice any symptoms.

## How do you prevent genital warts?

The best way to prevent genital warts is to use a [condom](#) for [vaginal](#), [anal](#) and [oral](#) sex. If you're sharing sex toys these should be covered with a new condom for each partner and washed between use.

If you have symptoms that could be genital warts you should go to a health clinic to have these checked. If you have genital warts, you may be advised to avoid sex while they're being treated. If

you do have sex, make sure that the warts are covered with a condom. This area of skin should be covered with a condom even after the warts have gone. You can still pass the virus on for up to three months after the warts have disappeared. Avoid rubbing or touching your warts, in case you spread the infection to the surrounding area. If you find out that you have genital warts your partner should also get checked.

Talking about your sexual health with your partners, and letting each other know about any symptoms or infections, will help you decide how to have safer sex together.

Reducing your number of sexual partners can also help you reduce your risk of getting sexually transmitted infections, like genital warts. If you are having sex with multiple partners, it's even more important to use condoms and to have regular STI tests.

Condoms are the best form of protection against STIs and pregnancy. Other [contraceptives](#) including the contraceptive pill will not prevent genital warts, neither will [PrEP](#).

## Get vaccinated

The [HPV](#) vaccine, developed to protect against more serious forms of HPV, can also prevent genital warts. The vaccine does not guarantee that you will not develop genital warts in the future, but it will reduce your risk. It's best to have the vaccine before you start having sex.

Ask a healthcare worker to find out if you can get the HPV vaccine where you are.

## Can I get tested for genital warts?

Yes - a healthcare professional will usually diagnose warts by looking at them. They may check for hidden warts, by looking inside the vagina and or anus. If you have a problem urinating, a specialist may look at the urethra (the tube that carries pee from your bladder).

This examination shouldn't be painful and you are welcome to have someone with you for the appointment if it would make you feel more comfortable. It's not something that you should feel embarrassed about, remember that the healthcare professional will do this all the time.

## How are genital warts treated?

The sooner genital warts are treated, the easier they are to get rid of. There are two main types of treatment for genital warts. The type of treatment you receive will depend on the type of warts you have and where the warts are. Treatments include:

- applying a cream, lotion or chemicals to the warts
- destroying the warts by freezing, heating or removing them.

It may take several weeks for the treatment to work. During this time, you may be advised to avoid soaps, or creams and lotions that could irritate the skin. You might also be advised not to have sex until you or your partner have finished your treatment, and the warts have gone.

Although these treatments can remove the warts themselves, there's no cure for the virus that causes the warts. Some people's bodies, however, are able to clear the virus over time.

You should always check with a healthcare worker before using treatments for genital warts. Many wart treatments are designed to be used on hands and feet and should not be used on your genitals.

## Genital warts and pregnancy

It's possible for pregnant women to pass genital warts on to their babies during childbirth, but this is rare. Talk to your healthcare worker if you are pregnant and think you might have genital warts. They will be able to advise you which treatment to use, as not all of the treatments available are suitable for pregnant women.

## Genital warts, HIV and sexual health

If you have genital warts you should also test for [HIV](#) and other [STIs](#). Having an STI, including genital warts, can increase your risk of [getting HIV](#). This is because having an STI makes it easier for HIV to get into your body and cause an infection.

People living with HIV can also be more likely to get genital warts or have more severe cases of genital warts. This is especially the case for people who aren't on treatment or who have a [lower CD4 count](#). You're more vulnerable to infections, like genital warts, if your [immune system is weaker](#).

Speak to your healthcare provider if you are living with HIV and taking treatment for genital warts, to make sure that the medication won't affect your [antiretroviral treatment \(ART\)](#).

# HELP US HELP OTHERS

Avert.org is helping to prevent the spread of HIV and improve sexual health by giving people trusted, up-to date information.

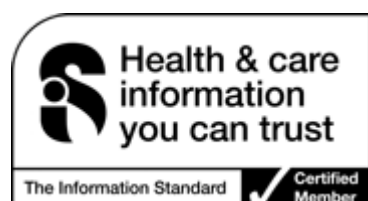
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## Sources:

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