

Genital Warts and Human Papillomavirus (HPV)

Genital warts are fleshy growths or lumps found around the genitals and anus. They are caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV).

Signs and Symptoms:

HPV infection is very common. Sometimes HPV infection causes visible warts. However, many people who have been exposed to the virus do not develop visible warts because their immune system keeps the virus under control. Warts are harder to treat in a person with an impaired immune system, such as someone living with HIV. Some warts may be difficult to see as they occur inside the vagina, cervix, or anus.

If you develop visible genital warts this does not necessarily mean you were infected recently as the infection may have occurred months or even years ago.

Treatment:

If you think you have warts, or may have been exposed to genital warts and/or are worried about HPV infection, you may need to see a doctor or sexual health clinic for a checkup. In most cases, the presence of warts can be confirmed by checking the genital area. HPV infection may be present without any visible warts. There is currently no blood test or swab test available to detect HPV infection.

There is no cure for HPV infection, although in many people warts and HPV infection go away on their own without any treatment. Various treatments are available that may be useful if warts are unsightly or causing discomfort. Discuss these with a doctor or sexual health clinic. Changes in the cells of the cervix caused by HPV infection can also be treated.

Transmission:

HPV can live in the vagina, vulva, cervix, anus or penis and sometimes the mouth or throat and is spread through direct skin to skin contact with a person infected with HPV. This occurs most commonly through sexual contact and can occur even when there are no visible warts. This explains why genital HPV infection spreads easily among sexually active people. HPV may also be passed from mother to baby during labour and birth.

Warts that occur elsewhere on the body are caused by different types of HPV. Contact with these warts does not cause genital warts.

Some people will feel upset about having HPV or genital warts. Often people feel anger toward their sexual partner, even though it is usually not possible to know exactly when or from whom the HPV was contracted. A diagnosis of genital warts does not necessarily indicate that your partner has had another partner recently.

Prevention:

Some types of HPV infection can be prevented by new vaccines which have been registered for use in Australia.

The National HPV Vaccination Program provides free vaccination for students in the first year of high school. For information about the program such as eligibility and where people can be immunised, see the Queensland Health [Immunisation Program](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/clinical-practice/guidelines-procedures/diseases-infection/immunisation/schedule) (<https://www.health.qld.gov.au/clinical-practice/guidelines-procedures/diseases-infection/immunisation/schedule>), or the [school-based vaccination program](http://www.qld.gov.au/health/conditions/immunisation/adolescents/index.html) (<http://www.qld.gov.au/health/conditions/immunisation/adolescents/index.html>).

The vaccine provided to Queensland school students can prevent infection caused by the four most common types of genital HPV. Two of the HPV types in the vaccine protect against the majority of genital HPV related cancers while the other two protect against the genital HPV types which cause 90% of genital warts. It does not protect against cancers and genital warts caused by the HPV types not included in the vaccine.

Vaccines are available on private prescription from your GP. You should discuss the protection each vaccine offers with your doctor.

Whilst one of the HPV vaccines targets the types of HPV infection that most commonly cause genital warts or increase the risk of cervical cancer, using condoms and/or dental dams is still recommended to reduce transmission of the virus and protect against HPV types not included in available vaccines.

HPV and Cervical Cancer

For information about cervical cancer and the links between HPV, see [Cervical Cancer Screening](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/public-health/cancer-screening/cervical) (<https://www.health.qld.gov.au/public-health/cancer-screening/cervical>).

Other resources:

- [Sexual Health](https://www.qld.gov.au/health/staying-healthy/sexual-health) (<https://www.qld.gov.au/health/staying-healthy/sexual-health>)
- [School Based Vaccination Program](http://www.qld.gov.au/health/conditions/immunisation/adolescents/index.html) (<http://www.qld.gov.au/health/conditions/immunisation/adolescents/index.html>)
- [National HPV Vaccination Program](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/internet/immunise/publishing.nsf/Content/immunise-hpv) (<http://www.health.qld.gov.au/internet/immunise/publishing.nsf/Content/immunise-hpv>)

Health direct factsheets:

URL: <http://conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthCondition/condition/14/188/64/genital-warts-and-human-papillomavirus-hpv>

Version number: 9

Date published: 7/12/2017

Date generated: 18/10/2021

- [Genital warts](https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/genital-warts) (https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/genital-warts)
- [HPV vaccine](https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/hpv-vaccine) (https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/hpv-vaccine)

Help and assistance:

For more information on genital warts and HPV, talk to:

- your local doctor
- your local sexual health clinic
- your local family planning clinic.