

GENITAL WARTS (Human Papillomavirus—HPV)

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is a virus that lives in the skin and tissue in the genital regions and usually doesn't cause symptoms. There are over 40 different types of genital HPV, and different strains can cause different symptoms. In men, HPV can cause:

MORE COMMON—GENITAL WARTS

These are usually soft, pink or flesh-colored bumps on or around the genitals or anus. There can be one or more of them and they can be very small or large.

LESS COMMON—ANAL DYSPLASIA

This is when cells in the anus begin to grow inappropriately. If left unchecked, this growth may lead to anal cancer. This is similar to how HPV can cause cancer of the cervix in women.

A doctor can take a sample of cells from the anus (anal Pap test) then have the cells tested to see whether they are normal. If they are not, this could be caused by HPV. Some men with HPV in their anus will develop anal dysplasia, and others won't, though anal dysplasia is more common in HIV-positive men who have sex with men.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE HPV?

The best way to know if you have HPV is to see a medical provider. If you are having anal sex, then your medical provider may want to give you a test called an anal cytology (or Pap) test to check for anal dysplasia.

CAN I CURE IT?

HPV is a virus that may stay around for years, but in most people the infection goes away on its own over time. There are treatments that doctors can give to get rid of the warts or eliminate the abnormal cells in the anus.

It is important not to use over the counter medications made for hand or foot warts on genital warts. Certain chemicals in these medications could harm your genitals.

ARE THERE ANY LONG-TERM EFFECTS?

Many genital HPV infections go away on their own. If left untreated, genital warts may go away, remain unchanged, or increase in size or number.

Anal Dysplasia: A small percentage of men with anal dysplasia will develop anal cancer. There are only a few "high-risk" types of HPV that can lead to anal cancer.

HOW CAN I PREVENT GENITAL WARTS?

HPV is passed from person to person through contact with infected skin. It can also be transmitted by unwashed sex toys or fingers that have touched warts.

The best way to protect yourself and your partners is to avoid having sex with someone with visible warts, and to not share sex toys.

It is also very common that HPV can be spread when a wart isn't there, so a condom should still be used even if you don't see any warts. Condoms, if used regularly, do help reduce the risk that a partner will get HPV, so they are recommended even though they may not work 100% of the time.

For More Information: UCSF – Anal Cancer in Gay Men, <http://ari.ucsf.edu/science/s2c/anal.pdf>

TO FIND AN STD CLINIC NEAR YOU GO TO WWW.HIVTEST.ORG OR WWW.INSPO.TORG.