DOCTOR EDGES™

HAIR RESTORATION | DERMATOLOGY | AESTHETICS | WELLNESS

Genital Warts

Genital warts (condyloma acuminata) are caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV), with over 100 strains. Subtypes 6 and 11 cause 90% of genital warts and are low risk for cancer. Subtypes 16 and 18 are high risk, potentially leading to cervical or anal cancer. HPV spreads through skin-to-skin contact during sexual activity, without requiring intercourse. Most infected individuals are asymptomatic and clear the infection naturally. Treatments for those who develop genital warts focus on removing visible warts.

Who's At Risk

Genital warts are the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI) and affect millions of people throughout the world. Approximately 15% of the US population is infected with HPV. HPV infection occurs in people of all ages and sexes. The risk of acquiring the virus is higher in those who have had many sexual partners and those who had sexual intercourse for the first time at a young age.

More than 50% of girls will get HPV within 2 years of becoming sexually active. It is estimated that 75%-80% of sexually active men and women will be infected with HPV at some point in their lives.

Signs & Symptoms

Genital warts may be smooth and flat or bumpy, or they can look cauliflower-like with a small stalk. They can be pink, red, white, grayish, or brown. Most genital warts are very small, but several warts can group together, forming a plaque (an area larger than a thumbnail).

Genital warts can be seen on the labia, vagina, penis, scrotum, anus, skin around the anus, and urethra. Genital warts usually do not have any symptoms associated with them, although the warts can bleed and become painful with intercourse if they are located within the vagina.

Self-Care Guidelines

To reduce the risk of genital warts, use condoms and limit sexual partners, though condoms don't fully protect against HPV. Gardasil-9, an FDA-approved vaccine, protects against 9 HPV types, including high-risk strains causing most HPV cancers and low-risk strains causing genital warts. It's approved in the U.S. for ages 9-45, with routine vaccination recommended at 11 or 12, but starting as early as 9. Vaccination is advised for everyone up to age 26, with some adults 27-45 also eligible. The vaccine regimen is 2 or 3 doses, depending on age and health conditions, and is most effective before sexual activity begins. Vaccination at 11 or 12 can prevent over 90% of related cancers.

When to Seek Medical Care

Do not attempt self-care if you suspect you might have genital warts. See Doctor Edges board-certified dermatologist for treatment to remove the warts and to reduce the chances of passing the virus to your partner. Also, if your partner has been diagnosed with genital warts, you should be checked for HPV infection. For women, it is important to have routine pelvic exams, which may include a Papanicolaou test (commonly called a Pap smear) to look for any signs of abnormal cervical cells, which can be the first sign of cervical cancer.