

GENITAL WARTS

What causes it?

Human papilloma virus (HPV). Over 130 types of HPV have been identified. Some of them can infect the genitals in both men and women. High-risk types of HPV cause cervical, vaginal, vulvar and other cancers of the genitals. Low-risk types cause genital warts.

How do I get it?

Skin-to-skin contact, such as vaginal or anal intercourse. HPV can potentially infect anyone who has had a sexual encounter, even without penetration.

What are the symptoms?

You may be infected by HPV but have no symptoms or have bumps too small to detect. Any time from 1 month to several years after exposure to the virus, you may get symptoms such as:

- small soft cauliflower-like warts or hard, flat warts, usually in or around the vagina, vulva, penis, scrotum, urethra or anal area
- itching or irritation
- Men should not confuse genital warts with normal small lumps on the head of the penis (glans).

How do you test for it?

- physical or pelvic exam for warts
- pap smear for women can detect an HPV infection
- other tests recommended by your health care provider

What treatment is available?

- there is no cure but your own natural immunity may help you clear HPV from your system over time
- stop smoking, eat a healthy diet, rest and avoid stress
- your health care provider can give you medication or suggest treatment like freezing or surgery to get rid of the warts: warts can grow back even with treatment

What complications can happen?

- some strains of HPV can cause pre-cancerous or cancerous changes in the cervix: women exposed to HPV should have a yearly Pap test and follow up treatment
- some types of HPV can lead to cancer of the vulva, penis or rectum

What precautions should I take if I have genital warts?

- practice safer sex and use a condom: keep in mind that even condoms may not prevent the spread of infection, depending on where the warts are
- get tested for other STIs and get vaccinated against hepatitis B if you are not already immune

What else do I need to know?

Genital warts are one of the most common STIs. It is estimated that 75% of Canadians will have a genital HPV infection in their lifetime, and 10–30% of adults are infected at any one time.

- HPV infections are usually acquired early (15–19 years of age) and over 80% clear up on their own within 18 months
- condoms may help decrease transmission of HPV, but do not eliminate the risk
- it's important that women have regular pap tests to screen for cervical cancer and genital warts

Currently, one HPV vaccine is available in Canada (Gardasil®). It protects against 2 high-risk and 2 low-risk types of HPV. The vaccine is given as a series of 3 doses over 6 months, and is effective for at least 5 years. It is recommended for girls and women before they become sexually active. However, it may be considered for women who are sexually active who may not have had all the strains of HPV covered by the vaccine. The vaccine is only preventive, and is not effective against strains of HPV that have already been acquired.

The HPV vaccine is currently available in the Yukon. It is provided at no cost to females in school when they are in Grade 5. If you did not receive this vaccine and are interested in receiving it, or would like more information, please see your community health nurse or doctor.

Where can I get tested?

You can get tested at:

- YCDC (Yukon Communicable Disease Control)
#4 Hospital Road
667-8323 or 1-800-661-0408 ext. 8323
- Community Health Centre
- [Medical Clinics](#)