

# Genital Warts (HPV)

Genital warts are a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by the Human Papillomavirus (HPV). They can occur on the skin around or sometimes inside the penis, vagina, anus, and occasionally in the mouth or throat.

Genital warts can be treated. They are a common infection in British Columbia.

## Causes

You get genital warts through vaginal, oral, and anal sexual contact. This includes both penetrative sex and sexual activities where there is skin-to-skin contact. Once you have genital warts, you can pass them to others even if you don't have symptoms.

## Symptoms

If you have genital warts, it is common to not notice any symptoms. Symptoms can show up anytime from a few weeks to many months after sexual contact.

Symptoms appear as bumps around, on, or inside your genitals, or around your anus. They are usually painless. Genital warts can be different sizes and shapes, including flat or cauliflower-like in appearance. They are often flesh-coloured but can also be darker than the surrounding skin.

## Tests and Diagnosis

Assessment and diagnosis for genital warts is done with a visual exam by a health care provider. The health care provider will look at the bumps to determine what they are. There is no laboratory test specifically for genital warts, so it's best to see a health care provider for assessment if you have concerns.

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## Treatment

It is up to you if you want to get treatment for genital warts. In most cases, they will go away without treatment.

Genital warts are treated by a health care provider, or with prescription medications at home. Treatments are applied directly to the genital warts to stimulate your body's immune response. You may need several treatments over a 4-to-16-week period. Talk to your health care provider to find the best option for you.

Removing visible warts does not always clear the virus from your body. The warts can return, or you can get warts again from a new HPV infection.

**Caution:** Do not use non-prescription wart removal products that you can buy in the store to treat genital warts. They are not meant for the genital area and can cause serious burning.

## Sexual Partners

It is up to you if you want talk to your current sexual partners about warts. Telling your partners helps them make informed choices.

Current partners can check themselves regularly for warts. If they notice any, they can see their health care provider for assessment and treatment.

## Complications

Genital warts don't usually cause other health problems. The types of HPV that cause genital warts are not the same as the "high-risk" HPV types that can cause pre-cancer or cancer. It is important that those who are eligible continue to follow [cervix screening recommendations](#).

**Pregnancy:** Tell your health care provider if you are pregnant and have genital warts.

## Prevention

The [HPV vaccine](#) can help prevent most strains of genital warts and cancers related to HPV. It is available for people of all genders. The vaccine will not help get rid of genital warts that you already have, but it can prevent future infections.

Regular testing for other STIs is a good idea, especially if you have new or casual sexual partners. Condoms are great if they work for you – the correct use of condoms can reduce the chance of passing and getting genital warts.

## Resources

**HealthLink BC – Information about HPV and genital warts in multiple languages**

<https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/hpv-genital-warts>

**HealthLink BC – Information about the HPV vaccine in multiple languages**

<https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthlinkbc-files/hpv-vaccines>

**ImmunizeBC – Information about the HPV vaccine in British Columbia**

<http://immunizebc.ca/diseases-vaccinations/hpv>

**SmartSexResource – If you are worried or have anxiety about HPV and genital warts**

<https://smartsexresource.com/topics/worry-and-anxiety>

**TransCareBC – Gender-affirming sexual and reproductive health information**

<http://www.phsa.ca/transcarebc/care-support/access-care/sexual-hlth>