

What are genital warts?

Genital warts usually appear as a [group of small, raised bumps](#) on the scrotum, or on the shaft or tip of the penis. However, you may also get a single wart. Warts may also appear in or around the anus.

Genital warts range in colour and size and may be [rounded or flat, smooth or rough](#).

The incidence of genital warts is highest in [young men aged 25-29 years](#).

In 2010, the incidence of genital warts was 1 in 135 Australian males aged 25-29, with an [overall incidence of about 1 in 500 males](#). Since then, the incidence of genital warts has [decreased by at least 50%](#).

Symptoms of genital warts

Apart from the warts themselves, genital warts usually don't cause any symptoms, but [they can itch in some people](#).

Causes of genital warts

Genital warts are caused by human papillomavirus. There are lots of different types of human papillomavirus, but types 6 and 11 are the ones that [cause genital warts in most people](#).

Human papillomavirus is passed easily between people through [skin-to-skin contact](#).

Diagnosis of genital warts

Your doctor will usually diagnose genital warts simply by looking at them.

Treatment of genital warts

Genital warts can be frozen, 'burned' or cut off by your doctor. There are some medications that can be applied directly to warts that may help them go away.

Genital warts will go away on their own eventually, even if they're not treated.

There is a vaccine available to prevent infection by the 9 types of human papillomavirus most associated with disease in humans, including types 6 and 11. The vaccination doesn't treat an existing infection, so it must be given before you're exposed to the virus to be effective.

In Australia, the vaccination is [available free as part of the National Immunisation Program](#) and is recommended for:

- All adolescents aged 9–18 years
- People with poor immune function
- [Men who have sex with men](#).

Health effects of genital warts

Genital warts are usually transmitted by sexual activity, so if you have them, there is the [risk of having another sexually transmitted infection](#).

Most wart virus infections are harmless, but a few types can cause serious health conditions. It's possible for genital warts to go away and then reappear.

It's also possible to be infected by human papillomavirus without having genital warts, and [the infection can last for years](#). This means it's possible for you or a sexual partner to be infected and to infect others without realising it. You might also pass the infection back and forth between you both. Using condoms makes it less likely to pass on human papillomavirus infection but does not prevent it completely.

Some types of human papillomavirus can cause cancer. The types of human papillomavirus that most commonly cause genital warts are not the same ones that usually cause cancers of the reproductive system in males and females. However, the incidence of some cancers seems [higher in people who have had genital warts](#) than those who haven't.

What to do about genital warts

If you think you have genital warts, you should see your doctor. You should also tell your sexual partner(s) because they might be infected.

Questions to ask your doctor about genital warts

- What would you suggest I do about genital warts?
- Should my partner see his/her doctor?
- If I have warts treated or removed, what complications of treatment should I look out for?
- Could the warts be caused by something other than human papillomavirus?
- Should I be tested for any other infections?

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