

WARTS, GENITAL (human papilloma virus)

TO YOUR HEALTH - PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

DESCRIPTION AND CAUSES

Genital HPV infection is a sexually transmitted disease (STD) that is caused by human papillomavirus (HPV). Human Papillomavirus is the name of a group of viruses that includes more than 100 different strains or types. More than 30 of these viruses are sexually transmitted. They can infect the genital area of men and women including the skin of the penis, vulva, or anus and the lining of the vagina, cervix, or rectum. Most people who become infected with HPV will not have symptoms, and their immune systems will clear the infection on their own.

Some of these viruses are called "high risk types" and may cause abnormal pap tests. They may also lead to cancer of the cervix, vulva, vagina, anus or penis. Others called "low risk types" may cause mild pap test abnormalities or genital warts.

Genital warts are caused by subtypes of the human papillomavirus (HPV), the same type of virus that causes common warts in other locations. They spread easily on the skin of the infected person and pass easily to other people and can be transmitted sexually. They may also be passed from a mother to her newborn during childbirth. The incubation period may be one to six months, or even several years.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Most people who have a genital HPV infection do not know they are infected. The virus lives in the skin or mucous membranes and usually causes no symptoms. Some people develop visible genital warts or have pre-cancerous changes in the cervix, vulva, anus or penis. Genital warts usually appear as soft or flesh colored swellings, usually in the genital area. They can be raised or flat, single or multiple, small or large and sometimes cauliflower shaped. They can appear on the vulva, in or around the vagina or anus, on the cervix, and on the penis, scrotum, groin or thigh. After sexual contact with an infected person, warts may appear within weeks to months, or not at all.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Multiple sexual partners; other sexually transmitted infections and not using condoms.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

There is no "cure" for HPV infection, although in most women the infection goes away on its own. The treatments are directed at the changes in skin or mucous membranes caused by HPV infection, such as warts and pre-cancerous changes in the cervix.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

Female cervical changes may progress to cancer. In males, urinary obstruction and in rare instances, cancer of the penis.

GENERAL MEASURES

Genital warts are diagnosed by visual inspection. Visible warts can be removed by patient applied medication such as podofilox or by treatments performed by a Health Care provider known as a cryosurgery or by applying a weak acid solution. Most women are diagnosed with HPV on the basis of abnormal pap tests. A pap test is the primary cancer-screening tool for cervical cancer or pre-cancerous changes in the cervix. No HPV tests are available for men. Pregnant women can pass HPV to her baby during vaginal delivery.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

The surest way to eliminate risk for HPV is to refrain from any genital contact with another individual. For those who choose to be sexually active, a long term monogamous relationship with an uninfected partner is the strategy most likely to prevent infections. Reducing the number of sexual partners and choosing partners that have had no or few sex partners will decrease the likelihood of infection. While the effectiveness of condoms in preventing HPV infection is unknown, condom use has been associated with a lower rate of cervical cancer, and HPV-associated disease. Gardasil is a vaccine for women which prevents infection of 4 types of HPV associated with genital warts and cervical cancer.

ACTIVITY & DIET

As with any virus, you are less susceptible to infection when you are in good health. Keep your immune system strong by eating nutritionally sound meals, getting sufficient sleep, exercising regularly, managing stress, avoiding tobacco (smoking increases the risk of cancer of the cervix), avoiding alcohol and mood-altering drugs, and avoiding vaginal infections.

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This information is for educational purposes only. Consult your doctor for specific medical advice, diagnosis and treatment.

618-453-3311

For after hours emergencies call 911 or go to the emergency room.

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FINDING SUPPORT

Some people diagnosed with HPV infection have felt depressed, angry, guilty, or frustrated. Accepting the diagnosis and talking to your sexual partner may be difficult and having to get repeated treatments may be discouraging, but keep in mind that many people have the same feelings and concerns. In time, most people stop having any recurrences or problems related to HPV. Call the Wellness Center at (618)536-4441 for more information, counseling or support.

NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF..

- The treated area becomes infected, red, swollen, painful or tender.

References: www.idph.state.il.us

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