

of possible irritant effect to your partner. Condoms will be weakened in contact with creams or solutions.

### What about my partner?

We advise using condoms to lower the risk of the virus passing to your partner/future partner. (Condoms can also help in reducing the risk of pregnancy and other sexually transmitted infections.) However, if you are in a long-standing relationship, there is probably no logic in starting to use condoms after the appearance of the warts, as it is likely that both of you already have the virus, even if no warts are visible. Ensure that your partner is aware that you have genital warts and knows what to look for in case he/she gets them. We recommend that he/she comes for general sexual health screening even if no warts are seen.

### Do warts cause cancer?

Cancer of the cervix is connected with some types of wart virus, but not the types that cause ordinary genital warts. We recommend women to continue to have routine cervical smears with the National Health Screening Programme.

Department of Sexual Health  
Florey and Contraceptive Services  
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<http://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk/florey-sexualhealth.htm>

Except for public holidays, the clinic is open: Monday to Friday 7am – 7pm.  
Saturday 9.30 am – 11.30 am.  
The clinic is closed on Thursday between 8am – 9am for staff training.

SH\_0122  
Sexual Health, July 2016  
Review due: July 2018

Newbury Sexual Health Clinic  
West Berkshire Community  
Hospital  
Benham Hill  
Thatcham RG18 3AS

9.30am – 11.30am on  
Saturdays (excluding those  
with a public holiday).

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# Genital warts

## Information for patients

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This leaflet explains what genital warts are, how they are spread and how they may be treated.

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### What are genital warts?

Genital warts are lumps that can occur in different shapes and sizes. They may appear anywhere on a man or woman's genital or anal area. A virus called human papilloma virus (HPV) causes them. The doctor will be able to tell you if you have them by examining you. Genital warts are one of the most common sexually transmitted infections that we see in sexual health clinics in the UK (according to STI annual data tables routinely collected by Public Health England).

### How are they spread?

Anyone can get the wart virus. Genital warts can be passed from person to person during sex and by skin to skin contact of the genital area with someone who has the wart virus. Warts can be external or internal. In women, warts can appear on or in the vagina, vulva (the lips around the opening to the vagina), cervix (entrance to the womb) and anus (the opening to the back passage).

In men, warts can be found on or around the penis, scrotum and urethra (tube where urine comes out) and on or inside the anus. The virus may be present without any visible warts. After catching the virus it can take months, and often longer, before warts appear. Some people carry the wart virus, but may never grow any warts; however, it is still possible to pass the virus on to a sexual partner. It is impossible to tell how long you may have had the virus.

### What treatment is available?

Genital warts are caused by a virus so antibiotics will not get rid of them. There isn't any treatment that will get rid of the virus completely. Smoking and poor nutrition may affect your immune system and make you deal less well with a viral infection such as HPV. Treatment is aimed at removing the warts that we can see. In time, most people will fight off the virus from their body on their own, although smoking can slow this process. However, there is a chance the warts may return after they have gone. It is up to the individual whether they choose to have treatment to aid the removal of any visible warts.

The treatments we may choose to use are:

### Clinic treatments

- Cryotherapy. This is freezing the warts with a liquid nitrogen spray or carbon dioxide. The doctors or nurses in the clinic will perform this. The clinic treatments are usually weekly.
- TCAA is a caustic (burning) chemical painted onto the warts. It has to be done by the doctors or nurses in the clinic as it burns away the warts and could harm healthy tissue if not accurately applied.

### Home treatment

#### **Women need to be on a reliable form of contraception for home treatment.**

- Podophyllotoxin solution (Warticon), which you will be told how to use at home. You will need to see the doctor again after four weeks of treatment. This method is not suitable for pregnant women. It is important to only use the treatment as advised by the doctor.
- Imiquimod cream, is not used as an initial treatment and is only suitable for extensive and resilient warts. This treatment is always given under a doctor's supervision. It works differently to other wart treatments by helping the body's own immune system to fight the virus, which in turn helps clear the visible warts. This method is not suitable for pregnant women.

The doctor will decide with you which treatment is most suitable for your warts. Some treatments may be used alongside others and most will need several applications/treatments. It is difficult to estimate how long the warts will take to go, as it depends on each person's response. (These treatments are recommended by the British Association for Sexual Health and HIV – UK National guidelines for the management of anogenital warts 2015)

### Will treatment be painful?

All treatments may cause redness and soreness but should not be painful. If you feel sore after treatment, taking a mild painkiller, such as paracetamol will help. Bathing the sore area with salt water (2 tablespoons of cooking salt in a bath) may also help to soothe the area. Try to avoid the use of soap and bubble baths, which may irritate the area. Always mention any soreness experienced at your next treatment. Avoid sexual contact after cream or solution has been applied because