

teaspoons in a bowl of water) 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 side effects at your next treatment.

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 STI's.) 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 may 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 a general sexual health screening even if no warts can be 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.

If you have any questions or worries, please ask to speak to a health adviser, either in the clinic or by telephoning 0118 322 7202.

Newbury Sexual Health Clinic
West Berkshire Community Hospital

Dept. of Sexual Health, Nov 2010
Review due: Nov 2011

Genital warts

Information for patients

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 in that area. Genital warts are the most common sexually transmitted infection that we see in genitourinary medicine clinics in the UK.

Anyone can get the wart virus. Genital warts can be passed from person to person during sex and by close 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 between two and nine 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, not by bacteria, 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, particularly for the first three months after they

seem to 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:

- Cryotherapy. This is freezing the warts with liquid nitrogen or carbon dioxide. The doctors or nurses in the clinic will perform this. The clinic treatments are usually weekly.
- 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. **Overuse of the solution may cause side effects and may cause burning of the surrounding skin.**
- TCAA is a caustic 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.
- Imiquimod cream is another treatment that can be used at home after instruction. It is not used as an initial treatment and is only suitable for extensive and resilient warts. 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. You will need to see the doctor during the course of this treatment. **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.

Will treatment be painful and are there side effects?

Some treatments may cause discomfort but are unlikely to be painful. Occasionally people may feel sore after treatment. We advise taking a mild painkiller, such as paracetamol, if you are sore. Bathing the sore area with salt water (2 tablespoons of cooking salt in a bath or 2