



**[The Lambda Clinic - Sexual Health Advice - Patient Information Leaflet](http://www.lambdaclinic.co.uk/genital-warts.html)**  
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## **Genital Warts (Anogenital Warts)**

### **What are genital warts?**

Genital warts (sometimes called anogenital warts) appear as small lumps on the genitals and / or around the anus (back passage). They are benign i.e. they cause no serious physical illness. They are caused by a virus called the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). There are over 90 types of this virus but most genital warts are caused by types 6 or 11. 'Common warts' that are found on hands and feet are caused by a different type of HPV.

### **How do you get genital warts?**

The genital warts HPV virus is passed on by sexual contact. You need close 'skin to skin' contact to pass on the virus. It can take weeks or sometimes months to develop warts after being infected with HPV.

### **Common presentations of genital warts?**

Warts appear as skin-coloured small lumps or larger cauliflower shaped lumps on the genital area. In men warts usually occur on the outer skin of the penis. In women warts occur mainly on the vulva. Warts may also occur on the skin around the anus in both men and women. Sometimes warts develop inside the vagina, on the cervix, on the scrotum, and inside the anus. Rarely, they occur in the mouth or nose.

Genital warts may occur singly or in groups. Genital warts sometimes cause itching and soreness but in most cases the warts cause no physical discomfort. However, genital warts can look unsightly and some people find this distressing.

### **How are genital warts diagnosed?**

Genital warts have a typical appearance and therefore there is no test that is usually needed to confirm the diagnosis. In up to 1 in 4 people with anogenital warts also have another sexually transmitted infection, so you may be offered tests for these.

### **What is the treatment for genital warts?**

It usually takes several weeks and even up to six months to clear genital warts, whatever the treatment you receive.

#### *Chemical treatments:*

**Podophyllotoxin cream** or lotion. This can be prescribed for you to put on the warts at home. You should apply it twice daily for three days, followed by four days rest. This is repeated six times, so the whole treatment lasts about six weeks. This treatment must not be used if you are pregnant.



**Imiquimod cream** is an alternative. This is usually used for genital warts which have not responded to podophyllotoxin or if there are multiple warts. The cream is applied to the warts and washed off 6 – 10 hours later. This is repeated three times per week for up to 16 weeks. Imiquimod can weaken condoms and diaphragms. Therefore sexual contact is not recommended while the cream applied to the skin.

*Physical treatments:*

**Freezing warts** (cryotherapy). Very cold liquid nitrogen is sprayed or applied to the genital warts. The freezing and thawing destroys the wart tissue. To clear the warts fully several treatments, a week apart, may be necessary.

**Surgical removal** of warts under local anaesthetic.

**No treatment:**

As genital warts are not serious, one option is not to have any treatment. Over time there is a good chance that they will go away without any treatment but this may take months or sometimes years.

**What about treating my sexual partner for genital warts?**

- Your sexual partner only needs to be treated if they have genital warts as well. If they do not have genital warts then they do not need treatment.
- There is no test for genital warts
- Condoms can prevent HPV from being passed on to new sexual partners who are not infected.
- You should use condoms whilst you are being treated for genital warts, and for at least a further three months after they have gone.

**Are genital warts associated with cervical cancer?**

The types of HPV that most commonly cause genital warts (types 6 and 11) do not increase the risk of cervical cancer. There are, however, some types of HPV that do increase the risk of developing cervical cancer and are also the cause of genital warts. It is therefore important that women continue to have cervical smear tests at the usual recommended times.

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