

What are warts?

Warts are skin growths that result from the skin being infected with a human papilloma virus. There are many different types of human papilloma viruses that can cause warts. Some cause warts on the hands, some on the feet (plantar) and some in the genital areas.

Who is at risk for warts?

People of all ages can get warts. Common and flat warts are most frequently seen in young children, genital warts in sexually active young adults, and plantar warts in school-age children and teenagers. The incidence of warts is increased in immunosuppressed patients.

What are the symptoms of warts?

Warts may appear as a single bump or a series of bumps on the skin. They may have a “cauliflower” appearance. Warts are generally painless unless they are irritated.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms generally appear about two-to three months after exposure, but can appear as early as one to as long as 20 months after exposure.

How are warts spread?

Warts are mainly spread from person to person by close contact. The viruses that cause warts are generally spread by direct contact with the wart. Some warts, such as plantar warts, can be caused by exposure of the skin to contaminated environmental surfaces, such as public shower floors. Genital warts are spread through close intimate contact.

When and for how long is a person able to spread the disease?

This is not known. It is suggested that as long as a person has visible sores he or she is able to spread the disease.

How is a person diagnosed?

This will depend on the type of wart a person has; some warts can be diagnosed through visual inspections, while others require laboratory methods. As always, consult a health-care professional if you are concerned you have warts.

What is the treatment?

Treatment and the need for treatment will vary. Warts can be removed by freezing, chemical or surgical means. Genital warts can also be treated with creams that enhance the immune response to the virus.

Warts may not always need to be treated. Decisions about treatment can be made with your health-care provider.

Does past infection make a person immune?

No.

Should children or others be excluded from child care, school, work or other activities if they have warts?

Exclusion is not necessary since warts very rarely result in medical complications. However, people with warts on their hands and who work in patient-care settings should make sure the warts are covered.

What can be done to prevent the spread of warts?

People with warts on their hands and other areas of their body should make sure the warts are covered to prevent spreading it to others.

People with genital warts should advise their sexual partners accordingly. How well condoms can prevent genital warts is unknown. Although treatment may remove the wart, the viruses that cause the wart may still be present in the skin.

Additional Information:

Additional information is available by calling the North Dakota Department of Health at 800.472.2180.

Resources:

American Academy of Pediatrics. In: Pickering LK, Baker CJ, Kimberlin DW, Long SS eds. *Red Book: 2015 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2015:[576-583]

Control of Communicable Disease Manual, 20th Edition-2015, Heymann, David, MD ed.