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# HUMAN PAPILLOMAVIRUS (HPV)

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## WHAT IS HPV?

HPV stands for human papilloma virus. HPV is a common sexually transmitted infection which usually shows no symptoms and goes away by itself. However, sometimes HPV infection causes genital warts and is responsible for cancers in the genital area.

## WHAT DO GENITAL WARTS LOOK LIKE?

Genital warts are growths or bumps in the genital area that vary in appearance, size, shape and number. Some have a cauliflower-like appearance.

## WHO GETS HPV OR GENITAL WARTS?

It is thought that the majority of sexually active individuals will be exposed to HPV infections during their lifetime. Most HPV infections will clear spontaneously.

However vaccination with Gardasil protects against the two high risk HPV types 16 and 18 which cause most genital cancers and HPV 6 and 11 which cause most genital warts.

## HOW DO YOU GET HPV OR GENITAL WARTS?

HPV and genital warts are spread by direct, skin-to-skin contact during vaginal or anal sex. They may appear within several weeks of exposure or they may take months to appear.

## HOW WOULD I KNOW IF I HAD HPV OR GENITAL WARTS?

You would notice a lump or lumps in the genital area. However sometimes people do not notice warts because they are inside the vagina or on the cervix or in the anus. You should go to a doctor or clinic if:

- You notice bumps, or skin changes on your penis, vagina, vulva or anus
- You notice any unusual itching, pain or bleeding
- Your sexual partner(s) tells you that they have HPV or genital warts.

## HOW ARE GENITAL WARTS DIAGNOSED?

Warts are diagnosed on visual inspection of the genital area.

## WHAT SHOULD MY PARTNER DO IF I HAVE GENITAL WARTS?

Visit a doctor or sexual health clinic for a general sexual health check up.

## HOW ARE GENITAL WARTS TREATED?

Options for treating genital warts include:

Practitioner applied:

- Cryotherapy or liquid Nitrogen to freeze the warts
- TCA (Trichloroacetic acid): a paint applied to a wart
- Laser treatment, is occasionally recommended and requires a general anaesthetic

Patient applied:

- Podophyllotoxin (Condyline™) paint for external genital warts. Not recommended for use in pregnancy.
- Imiquimod (Aldara™) cream for external genital and perianal warts. Also not recommended in pregnancy.

Regardless of the treatment used,

- It is important to remember that treatment does not get rid of the virus; it only treats the visible warts. For most people the body's natural immunity will get rid of the virus over time.
- It is advisable to seek medical advice before starting treatment for genital warts.
- Be patient – treatment often takes several visits and a variety of approaches.
- If you are pregnant or think you might be, tell your doctor
- Don't use over the counter treatments which are not specifically for genital warts.

## COMMON SIDE-EFFECTS OF CRYOTHERAPY, IMIQUIMOD, and PODOPHYLLOTOXIN

- Include localised skin irritation, ulceration, pain and discomfort. If these are persistent please see your doctor or health practitioner

## MANAGEMENT OF TREATMENT SIDE-EFFECTS

- Salt baths
- Analgesia—paracetamol (panadol)

## CAN HPV BE PREVENTED?

GARDASIL is a safe and highly effective HPV vaccine that can prevent infection with the four HPV types, 6, 11, 16 and 18, which cause most genital warts and genital cancers.

The vaccine is provided free in Australia to all year 7 school students, and currently through MSHC for young men, 26 years and under, who have sex with men

### **DISCLAIMER:**

This fact sheet is designed to provide you with information on Human papillomavirus (HPV). It is not intended to replace the need for a consultation with your doctor. All clients are strongly advised to check with their doctor about any specific questions or concerns they may have. Every effort has been taken to ensure that the information in this pamphlet is correct at the time of printing.

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