

Although HPV is associated with genital warts and cervical ...

Warts are lesions caused by infection with the human papillomavirus (HPV). Although HPV is associated with genital warts and cervical cancer, there are many different subtypes. The three most common types of non-genital warts are common warts, flat warts and plantar warts.

Common warts (*Verruca vulgaris*) are skin-colored raised growths that typically grow on the fingers, back of the hand and around the nails. Sometimes a black dot is visible on the wart. This dot is caused when a blood vessel feeding the wart develops a clot and seals off.

Flat warts (*Verruca plana*) are smaller and smoother than common warts and tend to grow in groups of 20 to 100 at a time. In children, flat warts most commonly appear on the face. In women, they are more common on the legs; in men, the beard area.

Plantar warts (*Verruca plantaris*) are warts that usually grow on the soles of the feet. These warts grow inward rather than outward. They can cause a significant amount of pain from pressure while walking or standing.

Researchers estimate about 10 percent of children and adults get warts at some point in their lives. Warts are more common in girls than in boys. The virus that causes the warts is passed by direct person-to-person contact.

Treating Warts

Non-genital warts are typically considered harmless growths. But patients with visible warts or large numbers of them may be embarrassed by the condition or receive a negative reaction from peers. In addition, some warts cause a significant amount of discomfort because of their location (like on the fingers or feet).

For those who want treatment, Kate Puttgen, M.D., Pediatric Dermatologist with Johns Hopkins Children's Center, recommends starting with an over-the-counter product containing salicylic acid. Higher concentration products can be obtained from a physician and may be needed on areas where the skin is thicker. The treatment should be applied at night and covered with white tape or duct tape, with the process repeated every day for about eight weeks.

Another common treatment for warts is cryotherapy. A freezing liquid (usually liquid nitrogen) is applied or sprayed onto the wart to destroy the abnormal tissue. Sometimes the top of the wart is scraped or cut away before the application of the liquid nitrogen. Cryotherapy is done in a doctor's office. The treatment can be painful and can take one to four visits.

In some cases, doctors may use a laser to burn the wart and destroy the tissue. Laser surgery is usually used for larger warts that are resistant to treatment. It is more expensive than other wart treatments and carries a slight risk of infection.

Puttgen says there is no single therapy that is effective for warts. If patients are able to wait out the time, two-thirds of all warts will eventually go away on their own, when the body eventually develops immunity to the virus. That can take up to two years or more.

For general information on warts:

American Academy of Dermatology

About the Author

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