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Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) Genital Warts, Condyloma

Genital warts are caused by the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). They appear anytime from three weeks, to three months after exposure to the virus. When visible on the vaginal labia and anus, they look the same as common skin warts. Warts on hands and feet probably do not spread to the genitals. HPV is usually transmitted during sexual intercourse with an infected partner. It is very contagious. Condoms may help prevent its spread.

On men, the warts usually occur on the scrotum, toward the tip of the penis, under the foreskin, and occasionally on the shaft of the penis.

In women, warts commonly occur on the labia, the perineum (the area between the vagina and the anus), and around the anus. Cervical cell changes and lesions due to HPV are the hardest to detect, and often are only discovered by Pap smears and/or colposcopy. Occasionally, the symptoms a woman notices are an increase in vaginal discharge or vaginal infection.

In the past, warts were primarily a nuisance and not associated with serious medical complications. The changes detected by a Pap smear and /or colposcopy indicate that women with HPV cervical lesions have a greater than average risk of developing cancer. Not all strains of HPV cause cervical cancer. There are more than 50 strains or varieties of HPV, but dozens are linked to the disease. At present, there is no inexpensive practical test for distinguishing between the strains. Therefore, it is important all condyloma be treated aggressively. Some types of Pap smears can be analyzed to detect which variety of HPV a woman has. This information can be used to help determine a woman's risk of developing cervical cancer if the HPV is left untreated.

No medication is available to cure this virus. Doctors can treat the cervical or skin cells where the virus lives with laser therapy, freezing or caustic chemicals. These methods help control the infection when it's active. The virus may retreat into cells and hibernate for as long as 20 years. No matter what treatment you have, it may take multiple sessions to bring the infection under control. It is important treatment continues until a Pap smears produce normal results.

*It is important that sexual partners be treated to keep the virus from spreading.

Treatment Techniques for HPV

Warts are caused by a virus. A virus is a non-living piece of genetic material that cannot live outside a cell. The only way to destroy a virus is to destroy the cells within which the virus lives. All treatments for warts have this purpose. As the warts do not, as far as we know, invade deep into the tissue, the purpose of wart treatment is to remove the superficial lining peels, and it is then replaced with a new clean lining without any scarring.

Laser Therapy

Laser therapy uses a highly charged stream of light to boil the water in the cells, causing them to burst. In this process both the cells and virus are destroyed.

Podophyllin

This is a resin made from plants which selectively destroys cells which contain the virus. It is applied with a cotton tipped applicator to small areas on the outer areas only. It also destroys a small amount of normal cells which causes some irritation. It should be washed off after about six hours following the application. It often requires about 1 to 5 applications over several weeks to remove the warts.

Trichloroacetic Acid

This is an acid which burns everything it comes into contact with. When applied to the outer areas only, it burns through the wart and down into the normal skin. It causes intense burning when applied and creates shallow ulcers after treatment. It should be washed off about six hours after application. It usually only requires 1 to 2 applications for the removal of the warts.

Imiqoud (Aldora)

This is a topical cream that is applied to external genital warts, and can be done by patients on their own time at home. The cream is rubbed into the warts at bedtime, and washed off in the morning (after 6 to 10 hours). This treatment is often done 3 times per week until the warts are gone, which usually takes 16 weeks or less.