

WARTS (verruca vulgaris)

TO YOUR HEALTH - PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

6.8

DESCRIPTION

Skin growths caused by a virus in the outer skin layer. Warts are not cancerous. They are mildly contagious from person to person, and from one area to another on the same person. They can appear anywhere on the skin, but most commonly on the fingers, hands and arms. They are most common in children and young adults between ages one and thirty, but may occur at any age.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

A small raised bump on the skin with the following characteristics:

- Warts begin very small and grow larger.
- Warts have a rough surface and clearly defined borders.
- They are usually the same color as the skin, but sometimes darker.
- Warts often appear in clusters around a "mother wart."
- Warts are painless and don't itch.
- Plantar warts appear on the soles of the feet.

CAUSES

Infection of the outer skin layer (epidermis) by the human papillomavirus (HPV) family. The virus causes some cells to grow more rapidly than normal. Warts are very common.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Use of public showers.
- Skin injury.
- People with weakened immune systems.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- To keep from spreading warts, don't scratch them. Warts spread readily to small cuts and scratches.
- Wear thong sandals in public locker rooms, swimming pools, or showers. Don't share towels.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

There is no one specific treatment for warts that works for everyone. Some warts go away on their own, others are cured with nonprescription medications. Some may require medical care that could include surgery. Nonsurgical treatment for warts may take some time, so be patient.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Spread to other body parts
- Secondary infection of a wart
- Recurrence of warts after treatment
- Scars where warts were removed

GENERAL MEASURES

Cryotherapy is a method of freezing the wart. This is an office procedure that doesn't require anesthesia or cause bleeding. Freezing stings or hurts slightly during application, and pain may increase a bit after thawing. Repeated treatments are sometimes necessary to destroy the wart. Electrosurgery is a method of using heat to destroy cells. This treatment can usually be completed in one office visit, but healing takes longer, and secondary bacterial infections and scarring are more common. If you have electrosurgery, keep the treatment site clean with soap and water. Cover with an adhesive bandage, if you wish. If you have cryotherapy, a blister (sometimes with blood) may develop at the treatment site. The roof of the blister will come off without further treatment in 10 to 14 days. You should have little or no scarring. If clothing irritates the blister, cover with a small adhesive bandage. If the blister breaks, the fluid may have active virus and spread to other areas; wash with hot water and soap, dry and cover the area. A bandage should be replaced daily with time for air drying to occur. For plantar warts, insert pads or cushion in the shoe to make walking more comfortable.

MEDICATION

- There are nonprescription topical medications for treatment of warts. Most are applied to skin daily for several weeks. Also available is a freezing aerosol product. Follow the instructions provided with any product that you buy.
- Your health care provider may prescribe stronger medications or injections for removing the warts.

NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF...

- After removal by cryosurgery or electrocautery, signs of infection appear (redness, pain, skin area feels hot, swelling, and fever).
- Warts don't disappear completely after suggested number of treatment.
- New warts appear after treatment.
- Warts appear on face or genital area.

References: www.familydoctor.org
www.webmd.com
www.aafp.org



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Illinois University
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This information is for educational purposes only. Consult your doctor for specific medical advice, diagnosis and treatment.

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618-453-3311

For after hours emergencies call 911
or go to the emergency room.