

Patient Diagnosis Resource for COMMON WARTS

Your Diagnosis

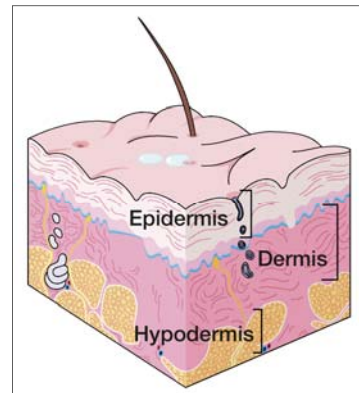
Your doctor has determined that you have one or more common warts, which are small skin growths caused by a virus. They are not cancer and do not increase the risk of developing skin cancer. Warts can occur at any time of life, although they often appear between the ages of 12 and 16. They are the second most common skin complaint, just after acne.

About the Condition

The skin is the largest organ of the body. Its top layer is the epidermis, which provides protection against the environment. The second layer of the skin is the dermis, which supplies blood, oxygen, strength and support. Underneath the dermis is the hypodermis, or subcutaneous fat layer, which provides an ongoing blood supply to the dermis.

Common warts — also called verrucae vulgaris — occur when areas in the surface layer of the skin grow faster than normal due to infection with one of the many types of wart-causing human papilloma virus (HPV). The resulting benign, or harmless, growths are usually bumpy and gray, white, pink or flesh-toned, but can also be dark and smooth. They often contain small black dots that look like seeds, which are clotted blood vessels within the warts.

The hands are the usual site of common warts, especially around the fingernails. Warts can spread to other parts of the body and to other people through direct or indirect contact. Some people are more prone to getting wart-causing HPV than others, and the virus occurs more easily in places where the skin has been injured.



In addition to common warts, two other main types of warts affect non-genital areas of the body: flat warts and foot, or plantar, warts. Flat warts, or verrucae plana, are much smaller and smoother than other warts and grow in groups of 20 to 100. They occur most often on the face in men and the legs in women. Plantar warts, or verrucae plantaris, can occur singly or in a cluster and are usually found on the soles of feet. They grow inwardly rather than protruding from the skin because of the pressure from walking. Plantar warts can be painful and feel like a stone in the shoe.

Treatment Options

Deciding on a treatment plan for your warts can depend upon a variety of factors such as their type and location and your age. Sometimes warts are left untreated because they may go away on their own. Up to 30% of warts spontaneously disappear within 6 months; the majority disappear within 3 years. Many times, however, warts are removed by a doctor to prevent spreading, deal with bothersome symptoms and improve the appearance of the skin.

This may be accomplished in one of several ways:

Cryosurgery – This most common method of treatment uses super-cooled gas to freeze and destroy warts. Stubborn warts may require repeat treatments.

Topical Medication – Another common treatment is the application of medication directly onto the skin (topically) to destroy warts. The drug cantharidin is often used for this type of therapy. Other medications that may be used include retinoids, podofilox, tretinoin and podophyllum.

Curettage – This procedure uses a curette (sharp scooping instrument) to scrape off warts.

Electrocautery – In electrocautery, an electrified needle is used to destroy warts.

Laser Therapy – Sometimes a high-intensity light, or laser, is used to treat certain types of warts.

Interferon Therapy – Another treatment choice is the injection of interferon directly into the warts.

Other Therapies – A variety of other therapies may be used to treat warts such as the injection of the drug bleomycin and biologic therapy with topical imiquimod cream, which enhances the immune system's ability to reject the warts.

In some cases, surgery to cut out warts may be necessary if other treatment methods do not prove to be successful.

What You Can Do

To make sure that you do not spread warts to other parts of your body or to other people, and to minimize your chance of developing new warts, you should take the following steps:

- ◆ Avoid touching or picking at warts on yourself or others
- ◆ Wash your hands thoroughly if they do come in contact with warts
- ◆ Keep your warts covered if possible
- ◆ Avoid biting your nails or picking at hangnails
- ◆ Keep your hands away from your face
- ◆ Avoid going barefoot in public places
- ◆ Keep your feet clean and dry
- ◆ Change your shoes and socks each day
- ◆ Wear water shoes while in locker rooms, swimming pools and saunas
- ◆ Avoid sharing towels, combs, brushes or footwear with anyone
- ◆ Treat new warts as quickly as they develop

Eating healthy meals high in vitamins A, C and E and minimizing stress can help boost your immune system against HPV. Also, be sure to promptly report any changes in your skin to your doctor.

Additional Resources

American Academy of Dermatology, 888.462.3376, www.aad.org

This patient resource sheet is provided to you as a service of CBLPath® and is intended for information purposes only. It is not meant to serve as medical advice or a substitute for professional medical care. Treatment options may vary, and only you and your physician can determine your best treatment plan.