



## Warts

### What are warts?

Warts are a common and harmless skin infection caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV).

### What are the symptoms?

Warts are round or oval growths that are often raised. They can be lighter or darker than the skin and often have tiny black dots on them. Warts can occur anywhere on the body and can occur alone or in clusters. Warts are usually painless but may hurt when they are on the feet. Different types of warts affect different parts of the body. Common skin warts can be anywhere on the body but are most often on the fingers, hands, knees and elbows. Plantar warts are found on the bottoms of the feet. Flat warts are often on the backs of hands, face and lower legs. Periungal warts are around the fingernails.

### How are warts spread?

Warts are only mildly contagious and are most often spread to other parts of the affected child’s body rather than other children. Warts are spread by touching another person’s wart or touching an object that has the virus on it, like a locker room floor. Sandals or other footwear should be used in locker rooms, public showers and pool areas. The incubation period is unknown but estimated to be two months to several years. It is unknown how long warts are contagious but likely as long as the wart is present. Children with warts can attend school and participate in all activities. In the case that your child plays a contact sport, try to cover the wart with a bandage to prevent spread to others.

### How are warts treated?

Treatment may depend on type, location, and patient preference. Treatments may last weeks to months and warts may return after treatment. Sometimes treatments are combined.

There are three options for treatment:

1. Watch and wait: warts will eventually resolve on their own with no treatment.
2. Treat in the doctor’s office with cryotherapy: this entails applying liquid nitrogen to freeze the wart. Treatment may be repeated every 2-3 weeks until the wart is gone and usually require several treatments. Side effects of this treatment are pain and redness and blistering of the surrounding skin.
3. At home treatment:
  - a. Buy the following:

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Amy L. Ryan, MD  
Robert S. Michaels, MD

Gregory J. Young, MD  
Louis Vernacchio, MD  
Eleanor R. Menzin, MD

Elizabeth H. Binney, MD  
Kristie A. Koppenheffer, MD  
Daniel F. O’Connor, MD

Margaret W. Manion, MD  
Molly Lederman, MD  
Joan E. McMenemy, PPCNP-BC

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- i. An over-the-counter wart medicine with the active ingredient 40% salicylic acid (e.g. wart stick)
  - ii. A box of occlusive dressings like Tegaderm or duct tape
  - iii. A pumice stone or emery board (nail file)
- b. Every day or every other day soak the wart in the bath or shower for at least 10 minutes to soften the skin, then rub the wart vigorously with a rough washcloth, a pumice stone or an emery board—don't be afraid to scrub hard and don't worry if the wart bleeds a little. The idea is to remove the dead white skin on top of the wart.
- c. After scrubbing, apply the wart medicine and cut a piece of the Tegaderm or duct tape to fit over the whole wart and a bit of the surrounding skin. Place the Tegaderm or duct tape over the wart and leave on for 24-48 hours.
- d. Leave the Tegaderm or duct tape on until the Tegaderm or duct tape falls off and then repeat. It often takes 4-8 weeks of treatment to get rid of warts, especially big ones and ones on the soles of the feet.

### How can warts be prevented?

Since warts are infectious, try not to touch or scratch the warts. Perform good hand hygiene after touching warts. Genital warts and cervical cancer are caused by different strains of HPV from the ones discussed in this handout; these can be largely prevented by getting the HPV vaccine at age 11 and can be discussed with your healthcare provider.

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