

### Is there a vaccine?

There is a vaccine which protects against the common types of HPV (types 6 and 11 which cause genital warts, and types 16 and 18 which cause the majority of HPV related cancers).

The HPV vaccine is offered to all first year students through the school immunisation programme.

This HPV vaccine is also available to some gay, bisexual and men who have sex with men and transgender women through public STI clinics, and to some people living with HIV who attend HIV clinics. Ask your healthcare provider for more information about the HPV vaccine and find out if it is suitable for you.

### Genital warts in pregnancy

Because of normal changes in the body's immune system during pregnancy, warts may appear for the first time during pregnancy.

During pregnancy, genital warts can be treated with cryotherapy (freezing). Having genital warts very rarely affects the baby. Pregnant people with warts should be reassured that there is very little risk to their baby. If you have warts and you are pregnant you should tell your healthcare provider.

**You can order more copies of this leaflet free of charge from [www.healthpromotion.ie](http://www.healthpromotion.ie)**

Produced by the HSE Sexual Health Programme



## A guide to **Genital Warts (HPV)**

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### What are genital warts?

Genital warts are warts in the genital area caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV). There are many different types of HPV. Types 6 and 11 are the types that commonly cause genital warts.

Genital warts are similar to the warts you can get on other parts of the body. They are usually painless and harmless.

Warts may sometimes go away on their own without treatment but can stay for months or even years.

There are some types of HPV that may lead to cancer, notably anal, throat, penile and cervical cancer.

The types of HPV that cause genital warts **do not** cause cancer.

If you have genital warts, we recommend that you have test for sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including chlamydia, gonorrhoea, syphilis and HIV.

### How common is genital HPV?

Genital HPV is the most common sexually transmitted infection worldwide. The highest rates of HPV infection occur in the 18 to 28 year age group.

The majority of HPV infections do not cause any symptoms and infections and many clear up on their own.

### How do I get HPV?

HPV is passed by skin to skin contact, usually genital skin to skin contact. This doesn't need to be penetrative sex (vaginal, anal or oral sex), but could be close genital contact.

It is common for sexually active people to come in contact with HPV.

Lots of people who come into contact with HPV don't develop warts.

### You cannot get HPV by:

- hugging
- kissing
- toilets
- swimming pools
- sharing cutlery or towels.

### What symptoms would I have?

Most people with HPV do not have any symptoms and they don't know that they have the infection.

If you do get genital warts, they are often flesh- coloured lumps or bumps on the skin, anywhere in the genital or anal area.

They may appear weeks to months after you come into contact with the virus.

### Can I be tested for genital warts?

Genital warts are diagnosed by the healthcare professional examining the affected area.

### How are genital warts treated?

Sometimes genital warts go away on their own without treatment, but most people prefer to get them treated.

Treatments may take a few weeks or months to work.

Sometimes the warts come back after treatment.

Treatments include:

- creams or lotions which can be used at home
- cryotherapy (freezing)
- surgery.

### What about my partner?

Your partner(s) should attend for examination if they develop any symptoms of warts.

### Is it ok to have sex again?

Yes. Many sexually active people have been exposed to HPV at some time but have not had any symptoms, so they may be immune.

You can talk with your healthcare provider about this.