

## What is HPV?

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is a viral sexually transmitted infection (STI) that is passed from an infected person through direct skin-to-skin contact during vaginal, oral and anal sex. In addition, it is possible, but rare, for an infected mother to transmit this infection to her baby during birth.

There are over 100 different types of HPV and approximately 40 types can affect the area on or between the genitals and the anus. Most of these types are harmless and do absolutely nothing. A person's body would simply clear (rid itself) of these types of HPV. However, there are several *high-risk types* of HPV that can cause pre-cancerous lesions on the cervix (and in other genital areas). These high risk types are also responsible for cervical cancer (and other genital cancers).

Out of the 40 types of HPV that can affect the genital and anal area, there are also several *low-risk types* of HPV. These low risk types can cause genital warts.

## What are the Symptoms of Genital Warts?

A person infected with genital warts will experience unsightly cauliflower-like growth(s). They are usually painless, but can cause a burning or itching sensation. These growth(s) can be found anywhere in the boxer short area (any area of the skin that a pair of boxer shorts covers). These areas can include the vagina, cervix, vulva, penis, scrotum, upper thigh, and anus.

*If you are experiencing any of these symptoms or any other unusual symptoms in the genital area, please see a doctor immediately before the symptoms disappear.*

Keep in mind that every individual case of

genital warts is different. One infected person may have two visible warts, while another infected person may experience numerous visible warts on the genital/anal area. An outbreak of genital warts will resolve with or without treatment after a period of time. However, after the primary outbreak resolves, a person may or may not experience additional outbreak(s) throughout his/her life. Keep in mind that the severity and reoccurrences of outbreaks can vary for each infected individual.

Also, it is possible for an infected person to be asymptomatic (experiencing no symptoms). *An infected person CAN transmit this infection when they are NOT experiencing symptoms.*

## How is Genital Warts transmitted?

As previously mentioned, HPV is transmitted during vaginal, oral and anal sex through direct skin-to-skin contact. A person is most at risk of transmitting genital warts when s/he is experiencing an outbreak. However, the important thing to remember is that an infected person can transmit genital warts when s/he is NOT experiencing any symptoms. It is possible for a person to never experience an outbreak of genital warts, but s/he can still pass the virus to a partner.

Keep in mind that vaginal and/or anal sex is not necessary to transmit the virus. If you and your partner's genital region (boxer short area) are in close contact, the virus can be transmitted this way. *There is a high transmission rate of genital warts without penetration due to the fact that genital warts are very contagious!!!*

## How Long Will it Take for Symptoms to Appear?

It can take 1 to 8 months after exposure for

symptoms to appear. However, in some cases it can take longer for a person to experience symptoms, or some people may never experience symptoms. These people have no way of knowing that they have been infected.

## When Should I be Tested for Genital Warts?

The only way for a person to be tested for genital warts is if s/he is experiencing growth(s) in the genital and/or anal area. A doctor will not complete a test for genital warts, but will simply visually diagnose the warts.

*Remember that if you have regular STI screening, you are **NOT** being tested for genital warts.*

## What Happens if I am Diagnosed with Genital Warts?

Because HPV is a viral infection, it is non-curable, but keep in mind the symptoms can be treated. Depending on the severity of an outbreak a doctor may prescribe a cream to apply at home or suggest a treatment at the doctor's office. The average timeframe to resolve an outbreak of genital warts is 8 months. There are factors that can affect the successful treatment of genital warts such as smoking, a Vitamin A deficiency or having another STI. Once the warts disappear, you may or may not experience additional outbreaks. *Keep in mind that more than 90% of people with genital/anal warts experience complete clearance of the virus within two years, with or without treatment.* This means that a person's body would completely rid itself of that particular type of HPV for life. Never assume that the virus has cleared from your body after a period of time. The virus

may still be present in your body and you could experience an outbreak at any time.

Please keep in mind that a diagnosis of genital warts is not a death sentence. People who are infected can still live happy lives and continue to have satisfying sexual and intimate relationships with other people.

If you currently have a partner, open communication is the key. Both you and your partner should be educated about the virus and the risks involved. Also, you and your partner should use protection at all times and refrain from sex during an outbreak.

### **How Can I Protect Myself From HPV?**

Due to the fact that HPV is so contagious, prevention of the virus is not easy. You will never be 100% protected from HPV when engaging in sex, even if you are using protection. **Condoms only protect up to 50% with HPV because it can affect any area in the boxer short region.** Proper and consistent use of safer sex practices will help to protect you from the virus as much as possible.

**Vaginal Sex (including sex toys):** Latex male condom, non-latex male condom **OR** female condom.

**Oral Sex on a Male:** Non-lubricated male condom **OR** flavoured male condom.

**Oral Sex on a Female or on One's Anus:** Dental dam. **You can make your own dental dam from an unrolled male condom (non-lubricated or flavoured). Simply snip off the tip of the condom and then snip up one side and unroll.**

**Anal Sex (including sex toys):** Latex male condom **OR** non-latex male condom.

*NEVER use two condoms at once!!!*

**Please note that a vaccine is now available to prevent the two most common high-risk HPV types associated with pre-cancerous cervical cells and the two most common low-risk HPV types associated with genital/anal warts. Speak to your health professional if you are interested in the vaccine.**



If you would like further information on HPV, STIs, testing and/or safer sex practices, please feel free to drop by our Centre or contact us by phone or email. If you want to see a doctor for confidential STI testing, please call us to make an appointment.

## **NL Sexual Health Centre is here for you!**

### **Location:**

203 Merrymeeting Rd.

### **Hours:**

Monday & Friday	9-5
Tuesday & Thursday	12-8
Wednesday	12-5

### **Phone:**

579-1009

Toll free 1-877-NO MYTHS  
(1-877-666-9847)

### **Website:**

[www.nlsexualhealthcentre.org](http://www.nlsexualhealthcentre.org)

### **Email:**

[info@nlsexualhealthcentre.org](mailto:info@nlsexualhealthcentre.org)

# Genital Warts (HPV)

