

Human Papilloma Virus (HPV)

Epidemiology

Human *Papillomavirus* is the name of a group of viruses that includes more than 100 different strains. More than 40 of these are sexually transmitted and they can infect the genital area of men and women, including the skin of the penis, vulva (area outside the vagina) or anus, and the linings of the vagina, cervix or rectum. Most people who become infected with HPV do not even know they have it.

HPV types are often referred to as “low risk” (wart causing) or “high risk” (cancer causing), based on whether they put a person at risk for cancer. In 90% of cases, the body’s immune system clears the HPV infection naturally within two years. This is true with both high risk and low risk types.

There are four major types of warts:

1. *Common warts*: usually grow on the fingers, around the nails and on the back of the hands.
2. *Plantar/Foot warts*: usually grow on the soles of feet. This type of wart tends to get pushed back into the skin because of the pressure exerted on them by walking and standing.
3. *Flat warts*: can occur anywhere but are found predominantly on the face (beard area) in men, and on the legs in women. They are smaller, smoother and tend to grow in larger numbers (20-100) at a time.
4. *Genital warts*: are soft, fleshy and occur around the sex organs. They can be raised, pointed or flat, painless and often invisible to the naked eye.

Incubation

The incubation period is approximately 2 to 3 months (range from 1 to 20 months) from the time of infection until the wart appears. For this reason, the source of the infection may be difficult to determine.

Transmission

- Warts can be spread from person to person by direct contact with someone who has the virus.
- Warts can be spread from person to person by indirect contact when the virus has contaminated a surface touched by an infected person, such as a pool deck or shower floor.
- Individuals with no visible warts may carry the virus and spread the infection.

- Individuals with weakened immune systems or open skin wounds may be more susceptible.
- Warts can also spread from one area of the body to another.

Each person's immune system responds to warts differently, meaning not everyone who comes in contact with HPV will develop warts. Some types of warts (genital warts) are quite contagious, but the chance of catching common warts from another person is small.

Infection Prevention & Control

Prevention of warts is not guaranteed, but follow these precautions when dealing with residents who have visible **common warts**:

- Follow Routine Practices when dealing with common warts. If warts are extensive and contact time is longer, then gloves may be worn.
- Wash hands carefully after touching any warts.
- Don't brush, clip, comb or shave areas that have warts in order to prevent shedding the virus.
- Don't use the same nail file or clipper on areas of fingers with warts as on other healthy areas.
- Discourage residents from picking at warts-cover areas of warts if necessary.
- Keep areas with warts as dry as possible-warts are more difficult to control in a moist environment.
- Common bathing/shower areas and any equipment used should be cleaned thoroughly with facility approved disinfectant after infected resident is bathed.

References

Common Warts retrieved 20/04/09 from:

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/common-warts/DS00370/DSECTION=prevention>

Warts retrieved 20/04/09 from:

<http://www.utoronto.ca/health/healthtips/warts/warts.htm>

Genital HPV Fact Sheet retrieved 03/06/09 from:

<http://www.cdc.gov/std/HPV/hpv-fact-sheet.pdf>

Heymann, D. (2008) *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual*, 19th edn. American Public Health Association, pp. 678-79.