

Treatment for Genital Warts

How do you treat this condition?

Genital warts are benign (not cancerous) and they are not dangerous. Genital warts will often resolve spontaneously. In 30% of women, the warts will resolve on their own as the body's immune system clears the virus within three months. Genital warts do not need to be treated. However, many people choose to treat the warts because they have physical or psychological symptoms (ex. Embarrassment).

There are many ways to treat genital warts. However, even with treatment, it is possible that the warts will come back because the treatment does not get rid of the HPV infection. There is no medical cure to eliminate the HPV virus from your body. Your immune system will do this over time.

All of the treatments are equally as effective and clear the warts about 90% of the time. If you choose to treat the warts, there are treatments that you apply yourself and treatments that your doctor applies for you.

Self-treatment

Read and follow the instructions that come with these medications carefully before applying to the skin. Most medications need to be washed off after a period of time – the exception is the sinecatechins 10% ointment.

Possible side effects of all topical medications include burning pain, redness, swelling and erosion at the sites of application.

- **Podofilox 0.5%.** This is a liquid solution or gel that destroys wart tissue. It acts by stopping the cells from growing and dividing, and stimulates your body to destroy the affected cells.
 - Apply it directly to the warts with a cotton-tipped applicator
 - Regimen: Twice daily for 3 consecutive days then discontinue for 4 days; repeat for up to 4 weeks
- **Imiquimod 3.75% or 5%.** This acts by stimulating your body's own immune system to fight the HPV. Possible side effects include burning, itch, redness, swelling, and erosion at the sites of application.
 - Apply a thin layer of this cream to the warts at night and wash it off with soap and water in the morning
 - Regimen: Apply every other night for 3 nights per week until lesions clear or up to 16 weeks
- **Sinecatechins 10-15% ointment.** This is a green tea extract that also stimulates the body's immune system. Local side effects including redness, itching, burning, pain, and erosion have been reported.
 - Regimen: Apply 3 times per day until lesions resolve or up to 16 weeks

Provider Applied Treatment

- **Podophyllin.** This is a liquid solution similar to Podofilox that is applied by your doctor once a week for up to six weeks. It should be washed off with soap and water within 4-6 hours. Possible side effects include itching, burning, redness and swelling.
- **Trichloroacetic Acid (TCA).** This is an acid that causes the warts to dry up and fall off. It can be repeated 1-2 times per week as needed for up to 4 to 6 weeks. Side effects are similar to Podophyllin.
- **Cryotherapy.** This treatment freezes the warts using liquid nitrogen or nitrous oxide. Your doctor applies it once a week for up to three months. The most common side effect is pain during the therapy.
- **Surgical Removal/Laser Therapy.** Surgical removal with cautery burns off the warts. Laser therapy generates extreme heat, which vaporizes the warts. Often only one treatment is required. You may be required to undergo a general anesthetic in an operating room for these treatments. Pain following the procedures can last up to three weeks. Possible complications include lightening or darkening of the skin at the treatment sites, and potential scarring.

Who do I see for follow up?

If the treatment is successful, you do not need to return to see the physician. If you still have warts after a course of therapy and would like to discuss further therapy return after you have completed your course of therapy and or return earlier if you are having problems with the prescribed therapy