

# Genital Warts

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## What are genital warts?

Genital warts are caused by a viral infection of the cells in the outermost layer of skin. They often feel bumpy, firm, and are usually in the genital and/or anal areas, or in the throat. These warts may be darker or lighter than your child's skin. The size and number vary, and over time, they may grow and spread.

Skin tags or common warts can be confused with genital warts. Common warts typically occur on hands and feet, and occasionally show up in the genital area.

Other names for genital warts you may hear are:

- Venereal Warts
  - Condyloma
  - HPV (Human Papillomavirus)
  - Condyloma Acuminatum
  - Anogenital Warts
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## What causes genital warts?

Genital warts are caused by a virus, which may be spread in several ways. The cause of genital warts is very difficult to determine, especially when a child is very young. Genital warts occur in both boys and girls.

- If the mother carries the genital wart virus, her child may be infected while in the womb or at birth. It may take up to two years, if not more, to notice signs of genital warts.
- A child can also get genital warts through sexual contact. For this reason, the healthcare provider may test for other STDs (sexually transmitted diseases).
- Although unlikely, a child can get genital warts through close non-sexual, physical contact (other than in the womb or at birth).

Because the possibility of sexual abuse is one reason your child may have genital warts, a very thorough work-up by a healthcare provider, and often a social worker, is likely to occur.

Most parents do their best to protect their children. It is normal to feel some anxiety when asked questions about the risks of sexual abuse to your child. When faced with these anxieties, it is helpful to get support from a family member or trusted friend. The provider and/or social worker can also help during this confusing time.

### To Learn More

- Ask your child's healthcare provider
- [seattlechildrens.org](http://seattlechildrens.org)

### Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line, 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.

### Who can I talk to about genital warts?

If you have questions or need more information on genital warts, call your healthcare provider or one of the following resources:

Harborview Assault & Trauma Center (Seattle)  
206-744-1600

Mary Bridge Sexual Assault Program (Tacoma)  
253-403-1478

Providence Sexual Assault Center (Everett)  
425-252-4800

St. Peter's Providence Child Sexual Assault Clinic (Olympia)  
360-493-7469

Partners with Families and Children (Spokane)  
509-473-4810

American Sexual Health Association  
[www.ashasexualhealth.org](http://www.ashasexualhealth.org)  
800-227-8922

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### How do warts affect my child?

- Children may scratch the warts.
- The warts may spread and cause discomfort or bleeding when your child goes to the bathroom.
- There may be concerns with how the warts look.

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### Should genital warts be removed?

Genital warts may disappear without treatment, but you should talk to your child's healthcare provider about this choice. If your child is uncomfortable, itching, bleeding, or having problems going to the bathroom, they may need treatment.

You may choose to have the warts treated even if your child does not seem bothered. A pediatric or gynecologic surgeon usually does the treatment. During the procedure, the team works hard to make sure your child is comfortable. Treatment removes the warts, but there is no cure for the virus. Genital warts may come back after they are removed. Children who have had genital warts should have regular periodic check-ups.

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Seattle Children's offers interpreter services for Deaf, hard of hearing or non-English speaking patients, family members and legal representatives free of charge. Seattle Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Call the Family Resource Center at 206-987-2201. This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Seattle Children's. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's healthcare provider.

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