



What are warts? Warts are very common, harmless skin growths caused by a virus. Warts can grow on any part of the body, but are most commonly found on the hands. Their appearance depends on their location. On the tops of the hands and face they protrude, while on pressure areas such as the palms and soles they are pushed inward. Warts do not, as many people think, have "roots" or "seeds"; the dark spots sometimes seen in warts are actually the ends of tiny blood vessels called capillaries.

Since warts are caused by a virus they may spread from person to person, but they are only slightly contagious. We do not understand why some people get warts easily while others never get them.

Are there different types of warts? There are several different types of warts that are differentiated by their location on the body. Warts on the hands are called common warts whereas warts on the feet are plantar warts. Warts on the genital area are known as genital warts or condyloma accuminatum, and are considered a sexually transmitted disease from skin to skin contact with an infected individual. Each type of wart is caused by a specific subtype of Papilloma virus. That is, each subtype of virus has a preference for a specific body site.

Do warts ever go away without treatment? Many warts will disappear spontaneously within 2-3 years. For this reason, and because all forms of treatment causes some discomfort, we often recommend not treating warts on young children.

How are warts treated? There are several ways of treating warts. All treatments cause some amount of irritation and inflammation, and none can be absolutely guaranteed to cure every wart with one treatment. The treatment used depends on many factors, including the size, location, and the number of warts.

- Liquid Nitrogen is an extremely cold liquid that is put on the wart by a medical provider until it is frozen. A blister may develop within a few hours. This may be filled with clear or dark fluid. It is best to leave the blister alone and allow it to dry; however, if the blister is painful you may prick the edge with a needle (after sterilizing the needle by holding over a flame for 2-3 seconds). If the blister roof breaks and leaves a raw surface, gently clean the

area with water and apply a thin layer of topical antibiotic ointment (eg: bacitracin, which is available over-the-counter).

- Salicylic Acid medications containing 17-20% salicylic acid are available over-the-counter. Brand names include Duofilm, Occlusal-HP, Compound W, and Mediplast. These medications should be applied to the wart only, avoiding the normal surrounding skin. They turn the top of the wart into dead skin, which turns the wart white. It is very important to scrub away the dead skin on the top of the wart a few times each week using an emery board, pumice stone, or washcloth. The dead skin will be softer and easier to remove if you soak the area first in warm water for 10 minutes. It may take several months for the warts to disappear.
- Podophyllin and Cantharidin are in office medications applied to the wart by your medical provider. Like liquid nitrogen, they may cause the site to blister.
- Imiquimod (Aldara) is a prescription cream which is used for the treatment of certain types of warts, as well as for skin cancers and precancers. Your provider will provide you specific instructions on the use of this medication.

How can I prevent getting warts? At the present time there is no vaccine or other way to prevent warts. Avoiding picking, chewing or shaving over warts as this may cause them to spread.

For more information on warts, please view our [All About Warts Video](#).