

GYNAECOLOGY & OBSTETRICS UPDATE

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Author

T.M. Malak

MB, BCh., M.Sc.,
Ph.D., DFFP,
MRCOG, FRCOG

Consultant
Obstetrician
Gynaecologist &
Urogynaecologist

Address

Esperance Private
Hospital
Eastbourne

Tel: 01323 414816/
410717/ 410929
Fax: 01323 730313

Web address
For Professionals
MarkMalak.com

For Patients
MrMalak.com

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Genital Warts

Genital Warts are caused by Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), which attacks epithelial cells leading to abnormal cell proliferation.

In general there are about 100 HPV different types, which prefer different anatomical sites (See table). Most visible genital warts are caused by HPV 6 (and HPV 11 to a lesser extent), regardless of morphology.

Molecular and serology studies report prevalence rates of 30 to 50% in sexually active adults. However most infections are subclinical and transient (< 2 years). Visible warts represent only 1% of infected cases

The long latent period means that the presence of warts in only one partner, does not necessarily imply recent infidelity

Risk of HPV acquisition rises with increasing numbers of sexual partners (HPV is rarely found in the genital tract of virgins). HPV detection declines with increasing age (immune response?) and increases with pregnancy, immune suppression and smoking

Transmission is from direct skin-to-skin contact. No cases of blood-borne transmission. Perinatal transmission is recognized. Infected articles (e.g. clothes) can transmit hand warts (? genital warts)

GP Management

- * There is no benefit in more frequent cervical screening (Not all strains of genital HPV produce CIN (Cervical Intraepithelial Neoplasm) and cervical cancer– see table)
- * Warts can recur in a quarter of cases after apparent clearance following treatment
- * Refer if pregnant
- * Refer for Colposcopy if cervical warts are present
- * Refer if surgery is needed for large affected area
- * Refer to GU, as 20 to 30% patients will have another STI (Sexually Transmitted Infection). If difficult and you are confident of the diagnosis, you can consider the following options after screening for other STIs (at the very least, a Chlamydia test):
 - * No treatment, as warts may regress spontaneously
 - * Cryotherapy – useful if keratinized warts
 - * Home treatments (do not use in pregnancy): e.g. Podophyllotoxin and Imiquimod 5% cream (Please see BNF for prescribing details)

HPV type	Warts/Lesions
1,2,4	Solitary plantar
2,4,26,27	Hands
2	Face
3,10	Flat warts
6,11	Laryngeal papilloma
6,11	Genital warts (rarely oral)
16,18	CIN and Cervical Cancer

Reference: Sexually Transmitted Infections in Primary Care, RCGP Sex, Drugs and HIV Task Group & British Association for Sexual Health and HIV, 2006