

## SWAT: Genital Warts

Genital warts are one of the most common STD's on the UNB campus, with 4.4% of UNB students who are aware that they have been infected. This is a modest estimation since most individuals have warts which cannot be seen by the naked eye and consequently many cases go undetected. Genital or venereal warts are caused by a member of the human papillomavirus (HPV). It has been reported in some studies that as many as 20% of sexually active individuals between the ages of 14 and 65 have HPV. Once an individual has come in to contact with HPV it usually takes between six weeks to twelve months before warts appear, developing in areas where a lot of friction occurs during intercourse leading to abrasion. It is impossible to tell how long you have been infected and as a result it may be difficult to ascertain who infected whom.

The most obvious symptom of HPV infection is the development of a small, soft, and sometimes itchy, lump or grey-pink fingerlike growth, which may appear as one or in a cluster. Warts will tend to be harder if they have developed in a dry environment, as opposed to moist skin folds on the body. Without treatment, genital warts may remain the same, get bigger, or even get smaller and eventually disappear.

The most common treatment for genital warts is an ointment which can be directly applied to the infected area. Since the medication works by burning away the wart it is important to protect surrounding tissues with a thin coating of vaseline. The ointment should remain on the wart for 1-4 hours and then be thoroughly washed off. For best results it is recommended that this procedure is repeated once a week for 4 weeks. Unfortunately, this form of treatment may only benefit as many as 20% of infected individuals. Alternative means to treat genital warts may include freezing, hot cautery, laser treatment, and surgical removal.

The presence of irregular cells on a PAP test may also be an indication of infection. Certain strains of HPV are associated with cervical cancer. In fact, up to 16% of all cancers in women are cervical cancers, and almost all are HPV-related. It appears that genital warts occur most commonly among sexually active persons aged 20-24, and are associated with multiple sex partners, use of oral contraceptives, and cigarette smoking. Various studies show that cigarette smoking doubles a woman's chances of developing cancer of the cervix. A woman who has slept with 6 different men within her lifetime may be 6 times more likely to develop irregular cells of her cervix. If she smokes the risk becomes 12 times greater.

If you are aware that you have genital warts abstain from intimate contact, until external warts have been treated. If you decide to have sexual intercourse use a condom. In order to prevent future infection use condoms on a regular basis and put on before foreplay because the HPV is highly infective. Unfortunately this is not always an effective alternative since 20% of all males with HPV are infected at the base of the penis or on the scrotum, areas which are not covered by the condom. For an extra precaution turn on the lights and have a good look at your partner's genitalia before engaging in sexual intercourse.

For more information on genital warts please contact the AIDS Resource Centre through the Nursing Faculty.

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