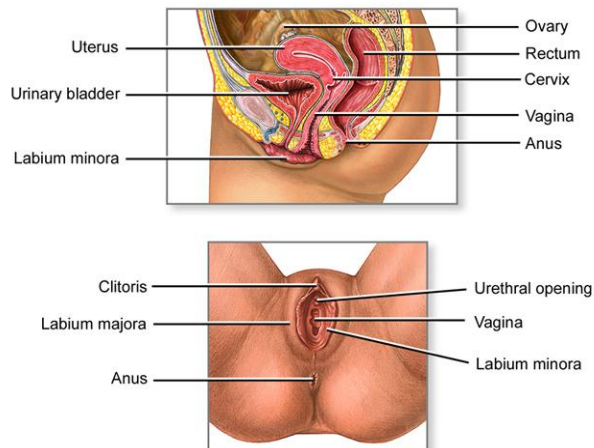


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Condyloma (Genital Warts)

Definition

The most common sexually transmitted disease, or STD, is the **human papilloma virus**, or HPV. It also is referred to as **genital warts**. HPV is three times more common than herpes. It is estimated that one in every ten Americans will have the HPV virus at some time.



Cause

Genital warts are highly contagious and spread by sexual or intimate bodily contact.

"At Risk" Groups

HPV is most common in men and women between the ages of 20 and 40, but it is present in all age groups and rich and poor alike. Many people have the virus and are contagious even if they can't see any lesions.

Symptoms

The HPV appears as soft, flat, irregularly shaped warts on, in and around the genitals, rectum, mouth and throat. They can even be located in the anus and in the **urethra**, the tube in the penis that transports urine from the bladder to the outside of the body.

They may appear as single, isolated lesions but frequently occur in groups. Very small warts cannot be seen with the naked eye and may not produce any symptoms.

Complications

Some forms of HPV can cause cancer of the cervix in women. There is some evidence that HPV may increase the risk of penile and bladder cancer in men.

Diagnosis

HPV is diagnosed by applying a special solution or full-strength white vinegar to the genital skin and then looking for the lesions with a special magnifying instrument.

All sexual partners must be evaluated and treated because they may carry the virus and, if untreated, they may re-infect the treated partner.

Treatment

Small lesions can be treated by applying **podophyllum**, an extract of the May apple that interferes with the virus, once a week. The medication must be removed with soap and water four hours after putting it on.

Interferon is a reasonably new anti-viral drug that can be injected directly into the lesion. The disadvantage is the expense and the need to go to the doctor's office three times a week for three weeks.

Cryotherapy consists of freezing the lesions with liquid nitrogen. Scarring is a rare complication of cryotherapy.

Surgery is often the quickest and most effective treatment for large lesions and those that do not respond to other methods. Electrosurgical removal uses a high-energy electrical current and has the advantage of less bleeding.

Small lesions can be removed using local anesthesia, or numbing the area. Larger lesions require putting a patient to sleep.

Lasers have been very successful in removing HPV lesions. Lasers' advantages include high cure rates and less bleeding after the procedure. The disadvantages are the expense and lack of availability in most physicians' offices.

Condoms are effective to prevent re-infection and transmission of the virus.

Uncircumcised men who continue to have lesions underneath their foreskin, circumcision is recommended.

Prognosis (Expectations)

HPV is probably one of the most common sexually transmitted diseases in the United States. Even with removing the lesions that can be seen, it is unlikely that all the HPV virus can be destroyed. The use of condoms is strongly advised for those with lesions or when one or both partners are being treated.