



## **WARTS**

What are warts?

Warts are benign growths caused by a virus – human papillomavirus (HPV). Over 80 different types of HPV have been identified. Warts often appear deep, seeming to have “roots”. Actually, they infect only the uppermost layer of skin.

How do you get warts?

Warts are viral, and like most viral infections, are contagious. Peak incidence occurs during the teen years, up to 10% of all teens have warts! Contact with the virus is often indirect, such as by walking barefoot. From contact to visible wart is usually several months. The risk of catching the virus is small, however, and depends on individual susceptibility.

Why do some get warts and others don't?

Some people get warts from frequent exposure to the virus. Dermatologists, for example, have a high incidence of warts. Wart virus invades more easily when skin has been damaged. With dry skin there is a higher frequency, or in people who bite their nails or pick at hangnails. Others are just naturally prone to the wart virus. Just as some catch colds more easily, others develop warts more easily. This is true of those with eczema or asthma.

Do warts need to be treated?

In children, warts often disappear without treatment after several months or years. However, since warts can be spread to others and can be spread to new areas on your own body, it is probably best to treat most children. Warts in adults will not disappear as easily and quickly as in children.

There is no simple cure! If you decide to have your wart treated, keep in mind that a wart is a viral infection. There is no cure for ANY viral infection, whether the flu, chickenpox or warts. Viral conditions run a natural course. Warts are no exception. Treatment of warts must be tempered with the knowledge that most spontaneously regresses over time. It's important that the “cure” not be worse than the disease. You don't want to have your wart “cured” and be left with a permanent, possibly painful or disfiguring scar.

How do dermatologists treat warts?

There is no cure for the virus causing the wart. Treatment is aimed at removing the thickened dead skin created by the virus and/or trying to trigger the immune system to recognize the virus. Treatment options include freezing with liquid nitrogen, immune-stimulation (i.e., Aldara cream, injecting candida/yeast, or injecting the HPV or measles vaccine), electrocautery, Retin-A cream, application of acids, injection of cancer drugs, interferon, scraping/curettage, and blister-beetle fluid.

#### Alternatives

Alternative treatments exist. Even hypnosis has been effective! Many over-the-counter products work. These products all contain salicylic acid, which removes the top layer of dead skin. This is not unlike the freezing of “burning” off of warts, done in the office. Taking an oral zinc supplement (150 mg of elemental zinc per day) may help boost the immunity and help some people get over their warts.