

## Further information

Further information about STIs is available on the Soa Aids Nederland (STI AIDS Netherlands) website. Soa Aids Nederland is a centre of expertise for HIV infection and other STIs. The [www.soa aids.nl](http://www.soa aids.nl) website gives detailed information on HIV and other STIs. Young people can visit the Dutch information site [www.sense.info](http://www.sense.info).

# Genital warts



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## For answers to your questions on STIs, call the AIDS STI Infoline

0900-204 204 0 (10 cents per minute)

Mon - Fri 10 a.m. - 8 p.m.

Thurs and Fri 2 - 8 p.m.

or send an e-mail to: [infolijn@soa aids.nl](mailto:infolijn@soa aids.nl)

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Warts in, on and around the vagina, penis and anus are known as genital warts and are a sexually transmitted infection (STI). Genital warts are very common. They are as harmless as all other warts, but can be a real nuisance.

The warts are caused by a virus (human papilloma virus – HPV). There are different types of HPV viruses. Some of these viruses can lead to cervical cancer. But genital warts are caused by other types of papilloma virus, which are harmless and have nothing to do with cervical cancer.

The virus is passed on from one person to another by close contact between the genitals, but infection can also occur via the fingers and even the towels of people with genital warts. Many people who catch the infection do not actually go on to develop warts. An infection usually goes away without any symptoms at all. Even so, someone who is infected can pass the virus on to others.

## Symptoms

Genital warts can appear from a few weeks to several months after contact with the virus.

In women, the warts are usually found in or around the opening to the vagina or around the anus. Warts are sometimes seen in the vagina itself or on the cervix. In men, warts are mostly found on or around the penis, scrotum and in the area around the anus. Having warts around the anus does not automatically mean that the person has had anal sex.

Often there will be a few small warts at first, which then grow and spread. Sometimes you will have symptoms such as itching, pain or a burning sensation.

Not everyone notices genital warts themselves; they can be difficult to spot. They can also develop inside your body and go completely unnoticed. Genital warts can spread and get a lot bigger, particularly during pregnancy or if the person has an HIV infection. The warts are then often more difficult to treat too.

## Treatment

Treatment for genital warts is mainly for cosmetic reasons. In most cases the warts will go away by themselves, without being treated. But this may take years. Small and new warts react better to treatment – which is intensive and prescribed by a doctor. In many cases, the patient treats the warts themselves. This consists of regularly putting a cream or liquid onto the warts, usually a few times a week. The treatment may last for 5-16 weeks.

The doctor may decide to freeze, heat or surgically remove the warts. Surgical removal is usually done when there are a lot of warts (cauliflower-like groups). This is done under a local anaesthetic. Despite treatment, the warts can regularly come back. And even after treating the warts, the virus can still be passed on to others. If you have genital warts, it is advisable to be tested for other STIs.