

CONDYLOMA (genital warts), patient instructions

- Condyloma is caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV), which comes in many types.
- Approximately 80% of people become infected with HPV during their lifetime, but the immune system of most people resolves the infection without treatment within a couple of years. HPV infection is most common in young adults.
- The incubation period of condyloma from infection to showing symptoms varies from months to years. The exact time of infection is impossible to determine.
- The more sex partners you have, the greater the risk of being infected with condyloma.

Transmission prevention

- Condoms and dental dams provide some protection against infection, but they do not provide full protection. However, the use of condoms and dental dams also protects against other sexually transmitted diseases.
- The vaccine (Cervarix®) currently included in the vaccination programme for children and young people provides good protection against cervical cancer and precancerous stages, but it does not protect against genital warts. A prescription vaccine (Gardasil 9®) available from the pharmacy also provides good protection against genital warts. The vaccines also protect against vaginal and vulvar cancers caused by HPV and are also likely to prevent anal, penile, head and neck cancers caused by HPV.
 - Neither vaccine is therapeutic, meaning it does not cure genital warts or HPV infection.

Condyloma is transmitted through

- direct skin or mucous membrane contact of the genitals or genital areas and through the hands during sex
- vaginal and anal intercourse
- oral sex

Other simultaneous inflammation or lesions on the skin and mucous membrane increase the risk of infection.

Symptoms

- HPV infection is almost always asymptomatic.
- Low-risk virus types can cause skin-coloured cauliflower-like genital warts that can be seen with the naked eye
 - in the vulvar area
 - under the foreskin, on the shaft of the penis
 - in the urethral opening

- around the anus
- Although the visible genital warts can cause cosmetic inconvenience, they are harmless in terms of health.
- Human papillomavirus infection in the cervix and cellular changes are most commonly asymptomatic. In the case of a prolonged infection, high-risk virus types can cause a precancerous stage and thus create a basis for the development of cancer.

Examination and treatment

- Visible genital warts are diagnosed based on typical skin and mucous membrane changes. If necessary, the doctor can take a biopsy.
- Visible genital warts can be treated if they do not go away on their own.
- Genital warts can be treated at home with topical medication.
 - Your doctor prescribes a cream or solution, and you will receive detailed treatment instructions from the health station.
- Genital warts are also treated by freezing and laser in specialised healthcare at the Venereal Diseases Outpatient Clinic. The health station doctor prepares a referral or you can contact the Venereal Diseases Outpatient Clinic of HUS yourself Mon–Fri 8.00–10.00, tel. +358 9 471 86 220 (link to the HUS website: <https://www.hus.fi/en/patient/hospitals-and-other-units/skin-and-allergy-hospital/venereal-diseases-outpatient-clinic>)
- Prolonged infection with HPV can cause abnormal cervical cells that can be diagnosed with a pap smear.
 - In Helsinki, women between the ages of 25 and 65 are invited to undergo cervical cancer screening every five years. Women under the age of 30 are given a pap smear test and those over the age of 30 are given an HPV test. In some municipalities, screening involves women aged between 30 and 65. The purpose of screening is to diagnose the risk of cervical cancer at an early stage.
- There is currently no laboratory test to determine whether an asymptomatic person is infected with HPV in the area of the anus, external genitalia or throat.
- HPV infections in men are not screened, so a partner's HPV infection is not a reason for an asymptomatic man to seek medical attention and treatment.
- In a committed relationship, the use of condoms has not been shown to promote recovery.
- In casual sex encounters, condoms and dental dams must be used to prevent the spread of the disease. However, condoms/dental dams do not provide full protection.