Warts: What causes them and what can I do to get rid of them?

Warts are growths that are the result of a virus causing rapid growth of cells on the outer layer of skin. The virus, human papillomavirus (HPV), has 60+ types. While warts are commonly found on the hands or feet, certain types of HPV can cause warts in the genital area. Warts are contagious via direct contact with the virus. This can occur not only from person to person, but can also spread on the same person to other body parts that are in contact with the existing warts. Following is information on the types of warts and ways to treat them.

Types of Warts:

**Common Warts:** Common warts are usually found on fingers and toes, and have a rough, grainy, round appearance. The color is usually a little grayer than the surrounding skin.

**Plantar Warts:** Plantar warts are usually flesh-colored or light brown. They can have little black dots which represent tiny, clotted blood vessels. They are found on the soles of the feet and are not raised like other types. They can make walking uncomfortable.

**Flat Warts:** Flat warts are common in teens and children. They are smoother, flatter, and smaller than other types of warts. They are pink, brown, or yellow. Flat warts can occur on the face, arms, or legs.

**Filiform Warts:** Filiform warts are small flaps of skin (skin tag) that are found around the mouth, nose, or neck. They are usually skin color.

**Periungual Warts:** Periungual warts are found underneath and surrounding toe/finger nails. They can be painful and affect nail growth.

**Genital Warts:** Genital warts is the most common sexually transmitted infection in the U.S. It is characterized by small raised growths, usually red, pink, or skin colored, and can occur in clusters of 3-4. It can be spread rapidly to other parts of the skin, or to intimate partners. They can be found on the genitals, in or around the anus, and for women, in or around the vagina. Genital warts are not usually painful, but can sometimes cause mild pain, bleeding, or itching. Some types of HPV can lead to an increased risk for cervical cancer in women so accurate diagnosis and monitoring is important.

Home Treatments for Warts:

Before treating warts at home, it’s important to keep a few things in mind:

- Warts are contagious, especially when you start to treat them. Any object used (tweezers, file, etc.) should not be used on any other body part after touching the wart.
- Those with diabetes should not treat warts on the feet. A symptom of diabetes is numbness of the feet, and an individual could injure themselves without realizing it.
- Facial or genital warts (sensitive body areas) should not be treated at home.
- A doctor should be consulted if:
  - the wart looks infected (bleeding, pus, etc)
  - the wart is painful
  - the wart changes color
  - the person has diabetes or an immune deficiency (HIV/AIDS)

Common Treatments:

**Freezing:** Concentrated cold air (doctor’s use liquid nitrogen) is applied to the wart, killing the cells and allowing the dead tissue to be removed.

**Salicylic Acid:** This is the active ingredient in many home treatments, with daily application for a few weeks. Soaking the wart in water prior to treatment aids in effectiveness.

**Other:** Other treatments have been successful for some, including application of duct tape to the wart for several days, followed by soaking/scraping. Several rounds may be necessary.

**Surgery:** Minor surgery through a doctor can be considered for stubborn warts that don’t respond to other treatments. Laser, burning, and excising the wart have all been used successfully.
**How Can Warts be Prevented?**
If you have wart(s) already, you want to minimize the spread of them to others and to other parts of your body. There are several suggestions for this:

- Don’t pick your warts. Remember that the virus is contagious when the wart is opened up, or that top layer of cells is removed. When you pick your warts, the virus is on your hands and can be easily spread to other parts of your skin, or to surfaces that others may touch.
- Cover your warts with a bandage.
- Keep your hands and feet dry as warts are more difficult to control when moist.
- Wear footwear (flip-flops) when in locker rooms.
- Don’t comb, brush, or shave areas where warts are present.
- As with any virus, wash hands thoroughly and regularly, especially if in contact with someone who has warts.
- Genital Warts: Options for prevention include abstinence, condom use, limiting partners, and avoiding anyone who has signs of genital warts.

[http://www.healthline.com/health/skin/warts#Treatments](http://www.healthline.com/health/skin/warts#Treatments)