

What are warts?

Warts are lumps on the skin produced by a virus. The virus invades the skin, usually through a small injury, and causes the skin cells to multiply rapidly. Wart viruses are spread by touch or by contact with the shed skin of a wart.

Common types

The *common wart* is a small, hard, flesh-coloured lump with a 'cauliflower' surface. It can grow anywhere on the body, but is most common on the hands. It is usually painless.

The *plantar wart* (papilloma) is a wart that grows on the sole of the foot and tends to become pushed in as you walk. It is usually painful, rather like walking with a stone in your shoe.

Anal warts and *genital warts* are usually spread sexually and tend to multiply very rapidly. They are caused by a different strain of wart virus.

How common is the problem?

Warts are common in children and teenagers but less common in adults. About 1 schoolchild in 20 has 1 or more warts.

Do warts disappear if left alone?

Yes—many warts will disappear, without any treatment, if left alone. However, plantar warts and anal/genital warts take longer, and it is advisable to contact your doctor about these warts.

What is the treatment?

The treatment of warts is slow to provide a cure, but a patient approach is usually rewarding. Regular application of one of the proprietary wart paints should suffice, for example, salicylic acid plus lactic acid (both about 17% strength). Do not treat warts on your face and genitals with wart paint, because the skin on these areas is very sensitive. Anal and genital warts require special professional care.

Common warts

1. Soak the wart in warm, soapy water.
2. Rub back the surface of the top of the wart with a pumice stone.
3. Apply the prescribed paint or ointment, but only on the wart. It may be wise to protect the surrounding healthy skin with petroleum jelly (Vaseline).

Note:

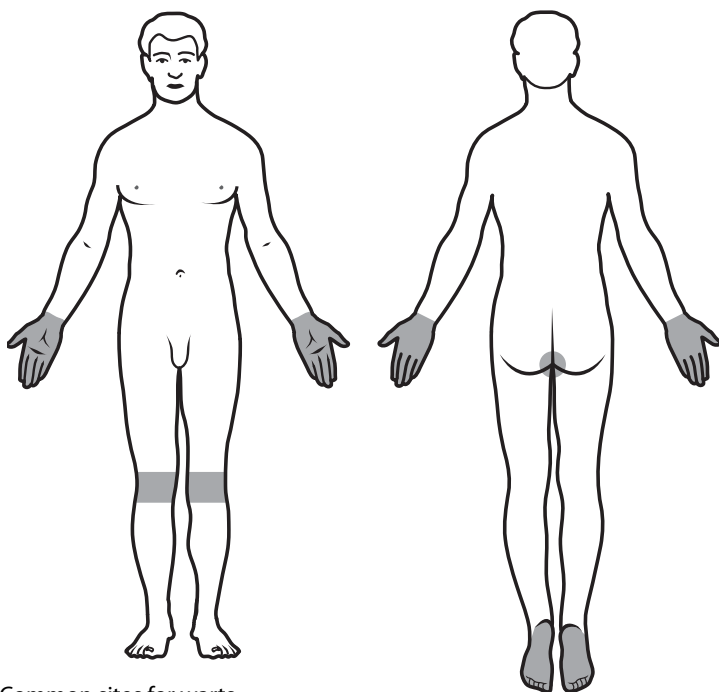
- Carry out this treatment every day.
- Carefully remove the loose dead skin between applications.

Plantar warts

The wart is first shaved back (pared) by your doctor with a sterile blade (this should *not* be done at home). Then use the same steps as for common warts. The use of the pumice stone is very important. Your doctor should check progress in 6 weeks. It is usually a very slow process.

Other methods

Some warts remain stubborn and other methods can be used by your doctor. These include freezing with liquid nitrogen, electrocautery and the application of very strong pastes. Most warts eventually respond to treatment, leaving the skin free of a scar.



Common sites for warts