Virgin with genital warts possible? [1]

Dear Alice,

Are genital warts only spread sexually? I am a virgin, and have had approximately three tiny warts just below the head of the penis for almost as long as I can remember. I dread the embarrassment of having these checked out, but I want to be safe. If they need to be checked out, where should I go in Health Services? Is it possible to request a male doctor?

?Didn't realize anything was wrong

Answer

Dear Didn't realize anything was wrong,

What you see on your penis may not necessarily be genital warts. In fact, there may be a number of explanations for the lumps and bumps you've observed. A health care provider is usually the best person to let you know what they may be. While it may feel embarrassing and strange to show such a private part of your body to anyone, keep in mind that your provider is trained to do exactly that. If you're interested, check out the response in What do genital warts look like? [2] in the Go Ask Alice! Sexual and Reproductive Health [3] archives for some information on possible symptoms of genital warts.

Keep in mind that the strains of the human papillomavirus [4] (HPV) that cause genital warts are spread through skin-to-skin contact of the genitals, so even a virgin [5] ? however you define it ? may have come into contact with genital warts. Nevertheless, there are other, often harmless, conditions that are mistaken for genital warts, such as pearly penile papules (try saying that three times fast) and mollusca [6].

You say that you have had these "warts? for as long as you can remember," so chances are they may not be genital warts. Still, if you are concerned about them, it may be a good idea to see a health care provider, who can provide you with more information.

Kudos to you for wanting to take charge of your health.

Alice!

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Genital Warts, HPV, & Condyloma [9]
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HPV vaccine for genital warts and cervical cancer [12]
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Clear of HPV symptoms = Clear of virus? [14]
What do genital warts look like? [15]

Resources

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Medical Services (CUMC) [17]
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