Dear Alice,

My boyfriend has genital warts, but he is very afraid of giving them to me. We were wondering if there was a condom that also covered up the scrotum. We ask because he was told that, even with a condom, he could still transmit the disease if his scrotum came in contact with my vagina. Please help.

? Horny in Chicago

Answer

Dear Horny in Chicago,

No condoms are currently available that cover the scrotum in addition to the shaft of the penis. Plus, the presence of genital warts is not limited to these areas? besides the vulva, vagina, and cervix of women, they can also be found in and around the anus and the inner thigh/groin region of men and women.

Transmission is most likely when warts are present; transmission is possible, though much less likely, when no warts are present. So, the particular barrier you propose, while innovative and logical in theory, wouldn't be able to completely protect against human papillomavirus (HPV), the virus that causes genital warts. Regular condoms can still reduce the risk of HPV transmission, but not as effectively as they can for other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) because of the number of places on the body HPV may be found.

In the case of genital warts, couples should try to learn about the facts, assess their individual risks, and figure out what they are and are not comfortable with. Some factors to consider include:

- The type of relationship (married, committed and monogamous, committed and open, etc.)
- Being aware of risk reduction methods
  - Refraining from sexual contact whenever warts are visible (though some are small enough to appear invisible to the naked eye)
  - Always using barrier protection, such as a condom or dental dam
- How often the affected partner has episodes of genital warts
- How well the partners take care of their health
Uninfected partners in married/committed/monogamous relationships with an infected partner are likely to have been exposed to HPV and may be more willing to accept the risks involved. For example, they may choose to forgo condoms or dams when having sex.

It sounds as though a discussion with your boyfriend would be a good idea. It takes courage and maturity to talk about this matter. He seems worried about the possibility of transmitting HPV to you. How do you feel about his concern? How concerned are you about possible exposure to HPV? Consider these issues when talking with your boyfriend. You may also want to talk with your health care provider to see if either of you might benefit from the HPV vaccine. For more information on the vaccine and who it’s recommended for, check out HPV vaccine for genital warts and cervical cancer. [2]

Learning more about HPV and its prevention and diagnosis, as well as openly discussing your options together, can allow you two to determine what's important to both of you in your relationship and what each of you is willing to accept in an intimate situation. For more information about HPV, take a look around the Go Ask Alice! Sexual and Reproductive Health archive.

Alice!
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