

Plantar warts

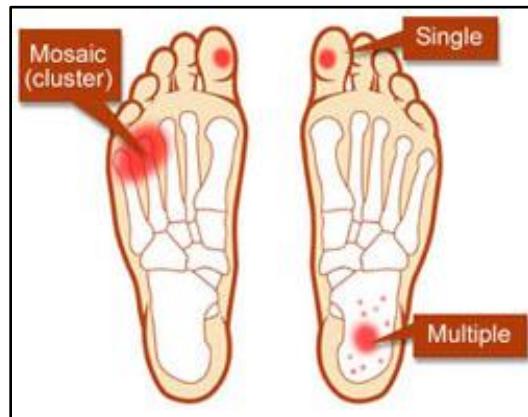
Plantar warts are skin growths on the sole of the foot caused by a viral infection of the skin. The virus is called the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). It invades the skin through small cuts and abrasions.

More than 100 types of the HPV virus exist, but only a few types are known to cause warts on your feet. Other types of HPV are more likely to cause genital warts or warts on other areas of the skin.

Warts are usually very painful if they are found on the bottom of the foot. Plantar warts have their own blood supply, and this allows the lesions to grow.

Sometimes dark specks are visible beneath the surface of the wart. These are blood vessels which have ruptured due to walking on the wart. They are often covered by thickened hard skin or callous and are painful on weight-bearing areas.

PLANTAR WARTS MAY BE PRESENT IN EITHER SINGLE, MULTIPLE OR MOSAIC TYPE PATTERNS. THE MOSAIC TYPE WART TENDS TO BE MORE RESISTANT TO TREATMENT.



Each person's immune system responds differently to HPV, so not everyone who comes in contact with the virus develops warts. Even people in the same family react to the virus differently.

Warts can affect any age group, but most commonly affect children and young adults.

Are warts contagious?

Yes, but the HPV strains that cause plantar warts are not highly contagious. Therefore, there is a low risk of passing them on to others. The virus is not easily transmitted by direct contact from one person to another. The virus needs a point of entry into the skin. This means that you are at more risk of being infected if your skin is damaged, or if it is wet and macerated, and in contact with roughened surfaces. A weakened immune system may also make you more susceptible.

The HPV virus does thrive in warm, moist environments – such as shower floors, communal bathing facilities, sport centres, gyms, and public swimming areas. Consequently, you may contact the virus by walking barefoot around pools or gyms.

How do I prevent warts?

To reduce the chance of passing on warts to others:

- when you're swimming or showering, cover any wart with a waterproof Band-Aid
- if you have a wart, wear thongs in communal shower rooms
- don't share shoes, socks or towels, and
- don't scratch your warts.

Treatment

Plantar warts should be treated if:

- they are painful
- they alter your normal posture or gait – this usually occurs in response to pain, or if
- you engage in activities which are likely to increase the risk of spreading the virus to others.

Warts may disappear by themselves in a few months to a few years, but this is unpredictable. Cutting back some of the wart and treating it with a caustic chemical is often very effective in curing warts. This is the treatment that most podiatrists use. Patients may need a treatment each week for 4-6 weeks. Another popular treatment is to freeze warts with liquid nitrogen.

Surgery is recommended as a last resort and only when topical chemical treatment or dry ice treatment has failed. This procedure is also used when a wart is too painful to treat.

Surgery

Surgery involves cutting around the wart and the normal skin margin. The incision is through the epidermis layer of skin but no deeper. The surgeon will avoid cutting into the next skin layer called the dermis, as this is more likely to cause scarring.

The wart is scooped out as one piece and a mild acid is then applied on the skin where the wart was sitting to "mop up" any viral particles remaining. A crater will be left in this area, but it will slowly heal over 3-4 weeks.