

sex talk.

answers to your questions about sex and relationships

wildfact

SexTalk answers your new questions about sexual health and relationships every Monday in the *Arizona Daily Wildcat*. SexTalk is written by Campus Health Service health educators.

Q If someone gets genital warts and gets them treated, they still have the virus, right? Do they have to use condoms and be careful of not transmitting the virus all their life? Or, does the virus go away with the warts, too?

A. Genital warts are members of the family of viruses called Human papillomavirus (HPV) that are spread by skin-to-skin contact, not by bodily fluids. There are more than 100 different types of HPV. Some types cause common warts on the hands or feet while others cause warts on the genitals. Other types of HPV may cause cellular changes on a woman's cervix. Human papillomavirus affects 3 out of 4 Americans between the ages of 15 and 49 during their lifetime, although many never have visible signs of infection. Over 5 million new cases of genital HPV occur each year in the US.

Once exposed, all viruses remain in a person's body, presumably for life. The good news is that many people's immune systems learn to recognize and overcome the symptoms of viral infections. Just as you get a cold virus, show symptoms (sneezing, runny nose, etc.) and then get better, the same thing is often true for HPV

infection. While it takes just two weeks to get over a cold, it can take up to 2-3 years for HPV symptoms to disappear.

Many students with genital warts don't want to wait for months to see if they clear up on their own. Typically, people seek treatment to remove the warts since they may be uncomfortable and unattractive. Common options include prescription creams like Aldara, freezing warts off with liquid nitrogen, or laser surgery. Even though removing warts helps with physical appearance, the skin around the warts is likely to contain infectious viral particles. After warts are removed, a person can still infect others – now and in the future. Consistent use of condoms (or latex dams) to reduce skin-to-skin contact is still one of the best ways to reduce the risk of transmission.

