



What Are Warts?

Forget about warts being caused by kissing frogs - because scientists now know that warts are caused by a group of viruses, which burrow down to the growing area of the skin and which then stimulate these small areas to grow more rapidly. As the skin matures and the cells die to produce the outer dead protective part of our skin, the affected areas become thicker and flakier and we call them warts.

Warts are abnormal growths, but are not malignant growths, when they appear on the skin. However, sexually transmitted genital warts are different and they are implicated in the progression to cervical cancer. That is why there is great excitement about the new vaccination program currently under way to reduce the chances of the wart viruses leading to this common killer of younger women.

Luckily all of us have an immune system, which is constantly on the lookout for viruses as they enter the body. When recognised the body will then respond by producing killer T cells to wipe the virus out before they get a foothold in the system.

I tell patients that wart viruses are a bit like stealth bombers: they deflect the normal radar of the human immune system and literally become invisible, allowing them to settle in and start their irritating process. Interestingly, for most so called normal warts on the skin, eventually the virus' 'cloaking' device will fail, the immune system will recognise the invader, and hey presto, the wart will disappear.

Professor Ian Fraser has been researching the link between wart viruses and cancer of the cervix for a long time and he knows a great deal about these microscopic particles, in fact there are many different types of wart viruses. He discovered that if you can get the body to recognise the viruses associated with cervical cancer, then the risk of developing this nasty disease is drastically reduced.

Obviously, if you've already got the virus through exposure to it from unprotected sex, then the vaccine will be less effective, and that is why the focus is on girls in their early teenage years, to prepare the immune system to recognise the viruses should they get into, or on the patients body. And it's been very successful!

Currently, all girls between the ages of 12 to 26 can receive the vaccine free. Obviously, you will need to talk to your GP to make sure that there are no real reasons why your daughter should not have it, such as medical conditions or allergies.

It's no use waiting until a visible wart appears, the causative virus is invisible and has done the damage before the carrier really knows that they've got it. The actual wart is a manifestation that you have a virus load on your skin somewhere.

But even without a wart, your partner may have been exposed in the past, and although he now loves you to bits and will remain loyal to you for the rest of his life, he still may infect you with the virus; so as the old adage goes, an ounce of protection is worth a pound of cure.

Dr. Duncan Jefferson

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