

Common warts are skin growths caused by a virus.

Warts are different from moles, and they aren't cancerous.

Q. What causes warts?

A. Warts are growths on the skin caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV). They are very common, particularly in school-age children. The virus, HPV, causes a rapid growth of cells on the outer layer of your skin. This virus enters the skin through a small scratch or wound. This explains why warts often appear around fingernails where the skin is often dry or cracked. After the skin becomes infected by the HPV virus, skin cells start reproducing more rapidly. This creates small bumps where the skin becomes a bit thicker than the surrounding skin.

Q. Are warts contagious?

A. Actually, yes. Warts can spread by direct contact to other parts of the body, or to others.

Q. Are there different types of warts?

A. Warts are sometimes described by their appearance or location:

- Common warts (verruca vulgaris) can appear anywhere on dry skin, but they are more commonly seen on the hands. They can appear in clusters.
- Flat warts are often on the face or legs. They are smaller and can be difficult to see.
- Plantar warts (foot warts) are located on the soles of the feet. The weight of the body pushes them into the deeper tissues, which can make them painful.

Q. What is the treatment for warts?

A. Warts may disappear on their own without treatment if your body's immune system finally recognizes the virus as foreign and starts to attack the underlying infection, however, this may take up to two years. These commonly used treatments can remove warts more quickly:

- Occlusion - covering the wart in a bandage or strip of tape
- Over the counter medications (salicylic acid)
- Cryotherapy (freezing)
- Electrosurgery
- Prescription medications

Warts have a tendency to return, so repeated treatments may be necessary.

Q. What can be done to prevent warts from spreading?

A. To reduce the risk that you or your child will get or spread warts:

- **Don't use the same file or nail clipper** on your warts as you use on your healthy nails.
- **Don't bite your fingernails** if you have warts near your fingernails.
- **Don't pick at warts.** Picking may spread the virus. Consider covering warts with an adhesive bandage to discourage picking.
- **Keep your hands as dry as possible**, because warts are more difficult to control in a moist environment.
- **Wash your hands carefully** after touching your warts.
- **Use footwear in public** showers or locker rooms.

Common warts are usually harmless and often disappear on their own. But you may find them to be bothersome or embarrassing, and you may want treatment to remove them.

Call Dermatology Associates of the Lowcountry at (843) 689-5259 on Hilton Head Island or 843-705-0840 in Bluffton / Okatie. Our experienced staff will provide the proper treatment.