

Verrucas

Information for patients, relatives and carers

What are verrucas?

Verrucae are plantar warts that commonly occur on the soles of the feet or around the toe area. They are caused by the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), which is contagious through direct person-to-person contact. There are various forms of HPV, which all relate to various parts of the human body.

What causes a verruca?

The wart is thought to thrive in moist, damp environments such as swimming pools, changing room floors and communal shower areas. It is possible to contract verrucae simply by walking across the same floor area as someone with a verruca, especially if you have any small or invisible cuts or abrasions that make it easier for the virus to penetrate.

Who gets them?

Verrucae are most commonly seen in children, teenagers and young adults - largely those who use communal changing rooms, although they can occur in adults of any age. It is possible to develop an immunity against the virus over time but most people remain susceptible, although some more than others.

How do I know I have them?

The most common appearance is that of a small cauliflower-type growth on the soles of your feet with tiny black dots. If it is painful when you pinch the area (like when you squeeze a spot), you are likely to have a verruca. They can grow to 1cm in diameter or more and may spread into a cluster of small warts.

Verrucas appear on your feet. They have tiny black dots under the hard skin.



Are they serious?

Verrucae are harmless but can be uncomfortable and painful if they develop on a weight bearing part of the foot. In addition, hard skin (callus) can form over the top of the verruca, increasing the discomfort in this area. There are also some strains of the virus that spread very quickly and can look unsightly.

What are the treatments?

In the first instance, avoid touching or scratching a verruca as it may spread into a cluster of warts. Instead, cover it up with a plaster. Evidence suggests that, in many cases, verrucae will disappear of their own accord, within six months for children but taking longer for adults (up to two years). This is because the body's immune system recognises the presence of the virus and fights the infection naturally but it can take many months for this to happen. If it is painless, no treatment may be required as some treatments can be painful, especially for children, and can cause side-effects.

For painful and/or unsightly verrucae or ones that are spreading, you can self-treat using ointments and gels from your local pharmacist following the instructions carefully. Sometimes, merely rubbing away the dry skin over a verruca and applying a plaster helps to stimulate the body's immune system to fight the infection. However, if your verruca becomes unusually painful or the surrounding skin area goes red, stop treatment immediately.

If you have a wart or verruca, taking the following precautions may help to prevent spreading it to other people.

- Don't share your towels, shoes or socks.
- Wear flip-flops in communal showers.
- Cover your wart or verruca with a waterproof plaster when you go swimming.
- Don't scratch or pick your wart or verruca as it's more likely to spread.
- If you use nail files or pumice stones on your wart or verruca, don't share these or use on other areas of your skin.

Remember – there's no reason why you can't continue to take part in activities, such as sports or swimming, if you have a wart or verruca. But do follow all the advice above, to avoid passing the virus onto other people.

Contact details;

Podiatry Service
Referral and Booking Management Centre
Bensham Hospital
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NE8 4YL
Tel: 0191 4458401

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In order to assist us to improve the services available, your information may be used for clinical audit, research, teaching and anonymised for National NHS Reviews and Statistics.

Further information is available via Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust website ([Privacy - QE Gateshead](#)) or by contacting the Data Protection Officer by telephone on 0191 445 8418 or by email ghnt.ig.team@nhs.net.

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