Will masturbating spread genital warts? [1]

Dear Alice,

I have the strain of HPV that causes genital warts. I am currently undergoing treatment from my health care provider. My question is, I enjoy masturbation and I was wondering if I should stop due to my condition. Through masturbation, is it possible to spread the warts to other parts of my genital region where there weren't present before?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Woe's the day that anyone stops masturbating (assuming they want to masturbate)!!

Like you suspect, when you have symptoms of genital warts, it's a good idea to be cautious in your diddling because it's possible to spread the warts from one part of your genitals to another. However, there are precautions you can take so that you can continue to enjoy the myriad benefits of masturbation without worrying about warts. Transmission risk is greatest from contact with visible warts, so avoid touching them. You can use a barrier such as a condom, dam [2], or non-microwaveable plastic wrap if the warts are on the shaft of the penis, the clitoris, and/or vulva. Or you can just avoid touching them if they're other places, such as your inner thigh or buttocks. (You can make up for neglecting those other regions in the masturbatory repertoire, once the warts are gone!) Washing your hands thoroughly with soap and water after the deed is done and keeping the genitals clean and dry are also helpful.

The strains of human papillomavirus (HPV) that cause genital warts are distinct from strains that cause warts on other parts of the body, so you don't have to worry about getting warts on your hands or elsewhere. Genital warts are contagious, especially if you're having an outbreak, so it's always important to communicate about and practice safer sex with your partner(s). Good luck with the treatment, and in the meantime, hopefully you can still find ways to keep those genitals (and the rest of you) happy.

Alice!

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