

## **Equine Warts (papillomas)/ Equine Papilloma Virus**

### **What are warts?**

Just like humans, horses can also develop warts. Warts, also called papillomas, are benign tumours of the skin. They are thought to be caused by a virus and are usually found in young horses (especially those < 3 years old).

### **Where do they usually present?**

It is common to see warts on the nasal area, muzzle and around the eyes as well as around the skin surrounding the penis or prepuce on male horses. Sometimes warts can develop on the lower legs or on the inside of the ears.

They are variable size but usually between 1 mm to 2 cm.

### **Are they contagious? Can they transfer to humans?**

Your horse cannot give you a wart. They are unable to spread from horses to humans or vice versa. However, warts are contagious to other horses, especially to other young horses, by direct contact, the virus can also be spread by flies.

### **Is there any treatment for warts?**

In almost all cases, warts are considered a self-limiting condition. This means that as the horse gets older, immunity develops and the warts will fall off without any treatment. Depending on the horse's age and immunity, this may take 3 to 6 months.

Removing the warts is usually not recommended unless they are causing a problem such as affecting their ability to eat or causing a lameness. If there are only a few warts, removing them surgically is reasonable but in most cases there are too many warts for surgical removal.

Human wart medications have been used in horses and are said by some to be effective. However, they are not approved for use in horses so I would be careful using human products.

It has been believed for years that crushing a wart with forceps and actually feeding it to the animal acts like a vaccine and causes the warts to fall off. Although this has been commonly done, there is no evidence that the technique really works. Although wart vaccines are available for cattle, there are no vaccines approved in horses. Unless the warts are causing a problem, it is best to leave them alone and let them fall off naturally.



Papillomata affecting the muzzle in a 2-year old. (Courtesy of S. Bjornson)