SYMPTOM

Penis lumps and spots

Penis lumps and spots are visible or raised skin changes on the penis.

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE
Small bumps, sores, blisters, or rough growths

WHERE IT IS FELT
Skin on the penis head, foreskin, or shaft

MOST COMMON CAUSES
Normal skin glands, pearly penile papules, irritated hair follicles

WHEN IT IS URGENT
Severe pain, rapid swelling, fever, or trouble passing urine

USUALLY LASTS
Days to lifelong, based on the cause and treatment

SEE A DOCTOR IF
New, changing, painful, ulcerated, or lasting beyond two weeks

Overview

Lumps and spots on the penis can include smooth bumps, rough growths, blisters, ulcers, or areas of changed colour. They may appear on the head of the penis, under the foreskin, or along the shaft.

Many are normal skin features or minor problems, such as visible oil glands or an irritated hair follicle. Others can be caused by inflammation, a skin condition, or a sexually transmitted infection (STI). Rarely, a persistent lump or sore can be a sign of cancer.

Appearance alone may not show the cause. If a change is new, persistent, or worrying, a doctor or sexual health clinic can examine it confidentially.

What it may feel or look like

Penis lumps and spots vary in number, size, colour, and texture. You may notice:

Notice whether the area is changing, bleeding, spreading, or affecting urination. Also consider recent shaving, new soaps or lubricants, sexual contact, and whether similar spots are present elsewhere.

- Tiny smooth bumps in an even row
- White, yellow, red, brown, or skin-coloured spots
- A pimple-like lump around a hair
- Rough or cauliflower-like growths
- Blisters that break into shallow sores
- A painless ulcer or open sore
- Itching, burning, tenderness, discharge, or an unusual smell
- Tightening, splitting, or pale patches of foreskin

Common causes

Normal skin features are especially common. Pearly penile papules are small, smooth, skin-coloured bumps that usually form one or more neat rows around the rim of the penis head. Fordyce spots are visible oil glands that look white or yellow. Neither is an STI, and neither is contagious.

Irritated or ingrown hairs can cause tender, pimple-like lumps on the shaft or nearby pubic skin, particularly after shaving. Folliculitis means inflammation around a hair follicle. It can result from friction, blocked follicles, or infection.

Balanitis is inflammation of the penis head, sometimes involving the foreskin. It may cause redness, swelling, spots, soreness, itching, discharge, or an unpleasant smell. Possible triggers include irritation, thrush, bacterial infection, and difficulty cleaning beneath a foreskin.

Contact irritation or eczema may follow the use of fragranced soap, shower gel, antiseptic, condoms, lubricant, or laundry products. The skin may look red, dry, cracked, or itchy.

Less common causes include psoriasis, cysts, and lichen sclerosus. Lichen sclerosus can cause pale, fragile, itchy skin and may gradually tighten the foreskin.

Some STIs also cause lumps or sores. Genital warts tend to be rough or raised. Genital herpes can cause grouped blisters followed by painful sores. Syphilis may begin with a single painless ulcer. Molluscum contagiosum causes small, firm bumps, often with a central dip.

Penile cancer is uncommon. Possible signs include a growth, thickened area, ulcer, bleeding, colour change, or discharge that does not heal. These changes often have another cause, but they should be examined promptly.

When to seek medical care

Arrange a routine appointment with a doctor or sexual health clinic if a lump or spot:

Seek same-day medical advice for severe pain, rapidly increasing swelling, fever, pus, spreading redness, or difficulty passing urine.

Go to an emergency department if the foreskin is trapped behind the penis head and cannot be brought forward, especially if the head is painful or swollen. This is called paraphimosis and can restrict blood flow. Emergency care is also appropriate after a significant injury with severe swelling or uncontrolled bleeding.

- Is new and has no clear explanation
- Lasts longer than two weeks
- Grows, changes colour, bleeds, or becomes ulcerated
- Returns repeatedly or is spreading
- Causes pain, itching, discharge, or foreskin tightening
- Appeared after sexual contact or may be an STI

How the cause is found

A doctor or sexual health professional will ask when the change appeared, whether it hurts or itches, and whether it has changed. They may ask about skin products, shaving, medicines, medical conditions, and recent sexual contact.

They will examine the penis and may check nearby skin and lymph nodes. Tell them if you have discharge, pain when urinating, fever, or sores elsewhere.

Depending on what they find, testing may include a urine sample, blood test, or swab from a sore or discharge. STI tests are confidential. If a patch or growth remains unexplained, you may be referred to a skin or urology specialist. Occasionally, a small skin sample called a biopsy is taken for examination under a microscope.

Treatment and self-care

Treatment depends on the cause. Normal features such as pearly penile papules and Fordyce spots do not need treatment. If their appearance bothers you, discuss safe options with a qualified clinician rather than trying to remove them yourself.

Irritation may improve after stopping fragranced or harsh products. Wash gently with

lukewarm water, dry carefully, and wear loose underwear. Avoid squeezing spots, picking sores, or shaving over inflamed skin.

Do not use ordinary pharmacy wart removers on the penis. These products can burn delicate genital skin. Avoid using leftover antibiotic like amoxicillin or doxycycline , antifungal like fluconazole or terbinafine , or steroid like prednisone or hydrocortisone creams without advice because the wrong treatment can worsen some conditions or hide their appearance.

Prescription treatment may include medicine for an infection or inflammation. Genital warts can be treated with prescribed creams or procedures. Herpes medicine can shorten or reduce outbreaks but does not remove the virus from the body.

Until possible infection has been assessed, avoid sexual contact involving the affected skin. Condoms reduce the risk of many STIs but do not fully cover nearby genital skin.

What to expect

Normal anatomical bumps usually remain but do not cause harm. Irritated follicles or mild skin reactions may settle within days after the trigger is removed.

Infections and inflammatory skin conditions may take longer and can return. Genital warts and herpes can recur even after treatment. Follow-up may be needed if symptoms persist, the foreskin becomes tighter, or the diagnosis is uncertain.

A lump or sore that does not heal should be checked again rather than repeatedly treated at home. Earlier assessment can identify the cause and help protect the skin from scarring or ongoing inflammation.

Common questions

Does every penis lump mean an STI?

No. Normal glands, pearly penile papules, irritation, and ingrown hairs are common non-STI causes. Testing is sensible if there are new sores or growths after sexual contact, or if the cause is unclear.

Can I identify the cause from a photograph?

A clear photograph may help a clinician decide how quickly you need an appointment, but it may not confirm the cause. Several conditions can look similar, and tests or an in-person examination may be needed.

Should I pop or remove the spots?

No. Squeezing, cutting, burning, or applying wart remover can cause infection, bleeding, and scarring. Have an uncertain or unwanted growth assessed before considering removal.

Could it be cancer?

Most penis lumps and spots are not cancer. However, a persistent ulcer, growth, thickened area, unexplained bleeding, or colour change needs prompt medical assessment.

Sources

- NHS: Lumps and spots on the penis
- DermNet: Pearly penile papules
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Anogenital warts - STI Treatment Guidelines
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Genital herpes - STI Treatment Guidelines
- British Association of Dermatologists: Lichen sclerosus in males
- Cancer Research UK: Symptoms of penile cancer