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Plantar Warts: What Parents of School-Age Children Need to Know

By Dr. Oliver Zong

Good health care and hygiene are important tools in helping your children reduce hazardous health issues. Schools can be a breeding ground for germs that can lead to a variety of health issues. Plantar warts are just one of the many health problems that can infect kids while they are in school.

According to Dr. Oliver Zong, a New York City podiatrist, it's important to know just how to keep your kids from getting plantar warts and, if they already have them, how they can be treated.

Plantar warts are hard growths that appear on the soles of the feet. They are caused by the human papilloma virus (HPV). HPV thrives in warm, moist environments, which is why it is easily spread at public swimming pools, communal showers, gyms and locker rooms. The virus can also enter the skin after having direct contact with someone who is already infected. Unlike other types of warts, a plantar wart can be very uncomfortable and are often painful. Because people develop immunity against these viruses as they get older, plantar warts are more common in children than in adults. Dr. Zong provides the following useful information on the symptoms of plantar warts and how they can be prevented and treated:

Symptoms:

*Small, bumpy growths on the soles of the feet that may feel spongy.

They may have dark spots on their surface (tiny capillaries that supply blood to the wart).

*Extreme tenderness in the soles of the feet when standing or walking.

*Bumps that interrupt the normal lines and ridges on the skin of your feet.

-May cause bleeding if scratched or traumatized.

-Often cause pain on the bottom of the foot and may feel like a stone in shoes.

Because of the pressure from standing and walking, plantar warts rarely rise above the skin's surface.

Treatment – Unfortunately, warts can be very resistant to treatment and can reoccur, but the following are some treatment methods that may prove to be effective.

Over-the-counter medications – Because these products contain chemicals that may damage healthy skin found around plantar warts, they are not recommended. Plantar warts should only be treated by a podiatrist.

Mild Acid – A podiatrist may apply a topical acid to the wart. The treatment

usually takes several weeks of multiple applications but will eventually disintegrate viral cells so that healthy cells can replace them.

Laser Treatment (CO2 laser cautery) – Performed as an out-patient procedure using local anesthesia; produces little scarring and is very effective for the treatment of plantar warts.

Prescription creams like Aldara and Carac – Have proven to be a painless alternative to help rid patients of viral lesions and have become more popular among podiatrists in recent years. Formulations with formaldehyde are also very effective.

Cryotherapy – A procedure that “freezes” plantar warts with a very cold solution. Cryotherapy destroys the virus and causes the wart to turn black and fall off. It can, however, be painful. The procedure may also prove ineffective if the solution does not penetrate far enough to completely destroy HPV.

Debridement – Surgical removal of warts. Not generally recommended for the treatment of plantar warts because it can cause painful scarring. It is often used as a last resort to treat very large warts.

Prevention:

Warn your children about the risks associated with walking barefoot in public places. Protect their feet with shower shoes, thongs or rubber swimming shoes and encourage them to wash their feet with soap and warm water after swimming or changing in the school gym.

Encourage children to change their socks and shoes daily.

Have children keep their feet dry and clean.

Do not ignore growths or changes in your child’s skin.

Check children’s feet periodically – the sooner plantar warts are discovered, the better the chance that treatment will prove effective. While it may not be fully possible to prevent plantar warts, early detection is very important since it is much easier to treat a smaller wart before it spreads or before it becomes larger and entrenched.

Dr. Oliver Zong is a podiatrist in Manhattan’s influential Financial District. As one of the premier cosmetic foot surgeons in the country, he serves as the Director of Surgery at NYC FootCare and is on the Board of Directors at Gramercy Park Surgery Center. Besides traditional and cosmetic foot surgery, Dr. Zong is also an accomplished cryosurgeon and co-founder of the Podiatric Cryosurgery Center of New York. He is an attending physician at NYU Downtown Hospital, Wyckoff Heights Medical Center, Cabrini Medical Center, Gramercy Park Surgery Center and Fifth Avenue Surgery Center. Dr. Zong is in private practice with 2 office locations in Lower Manhattan and is co-owner of NY Serenity Day Spa in beautiful Scarsdale, NY. Dr. Zong is also featured as an expert columnist for Shoes.com, the nation’s largest online retailer of footwear. For more information please visit www.nycfootcare.com.