WHAT ARE WARTS AND VERRUCAS?
■ Warts and verrucas are caused by strains of the human papilloma virus (HPV).
■ The virus causes an overgrowth of the skin layer at the base of the epidermis, called the prickle cell layer. This results in excessive local production of the horny material keratin.
■ All warts are essentially the same, although the form they take depends on their location on the body and the thickness of the skin.
■ Verrucas are warts that appear on the sole of the foot. Pressure from the weight of the body forces them deeply into the thick skin of the sole of the foot.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS
■ Warts are small, fleshy, grainy bumps that may be flesh-coloured, white, pink or tan.
■ Verrucas tend to be flattened with a surface covered with black dots – these are small blood vessels.
■ Warts and verrucas are usually asymptomatic and are not painful unless they are squeezed from the sides or have direct force applied to them.

TREATMENT
■ Warts and verrucas will disappear spontaneously over time, and treatment is only required if they are painful, unsightly, persistent, or cause distress.
■ Treatment can be a slow and frustrating process and poor compliance often leads to disappointing results.
■ Treatment usually relies on local tissue destruction.
■ Over-the-counter products containing salicylic acid, formaldehyde, gluteraldehyde or silver nitrate are available.
■ The callus surrounding a wart or verruca can be removed with a pumice stone.
■ Cryosurgery involves freezing the tissues at temperatures below -60°C using liquid nitrogen.
■ Electrocautery, curettage and laser treatment are alternative treatment options.

INCIDENCE
Warts can appear anywhere on the body but are most common on the hands and feet.
Most people will have a wart or verruca at some point in their lives.
Children and teenagers are more likely to get them than adults.
About one in 20 schoolchildren has warts or verrucas at any one time.
The wart virus is contagious and warts and verrucas release thousands of viruses, which can then infect others.
A break in the skin gives the virus an opportunity to enter and cause a wart or verruca.
Warts seem to appear and disappear without any obvious cause; this is due to changes in the body’s resistance to the virus.

COMPLICATIONS
■ Warts and verrucas occur in large numbers in people whose immune systems are compromised by disease or medical treatment.
■ Genital warts are linked with cancer of the cervix, although the exact nature of the link is not fully understood.
■ Single warts in older patients may be squamous carcinoma.

REFERENCES

WEBSITES
NHS Direct warts and verruca information is at: www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/SelfHelp/conditions/wartsandverrcas/wartsandverruca.asp
Netdoctor factsheet on warts and verrucas is at: www.netdoctor.co.uk/diseases/facts/warts.htm