

Oral Papilloma Virus in Dogs

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Your parents probably warned you that kissing a stranger was like kissing everyone that person kissed. Well, they were right and the same advice applies to your dog.

What is papilloma virus?

Canine oral papillomas, also known as oral warts, are small, benign [tumors](#) of the mouth caused by the papilloma [virus](#). They are found on the lips, [gums](#), [mouth](#), and rarely can also be located on other mucous membranes.

Causes of papilloma virus in dogs

Canine oral papillomas usually affect [young dogs](#), under the [age](#) of 2. Young dogs are more susceptible to the papilloma virus because their immune system is not fully developed. As their immune system matures, they produce antibodies against the virus and the warts can eventually disappear. Affected dogs can transmit the virus to other dogs through direct contact. This usually occurs when they greet each other, share toys, or eat/drink out of the same [food](#) or water bowl. Canine papilloma virus is species-specific and therefore cannot be transmitted from [dogs](#) to humans or [cats](#).

Symptoms of papilloma virus in dogs:

Papillomas typically develop on the lips, tongue, [throat](#) or gums. They are round and have an irregular surface, reminiscent of a cauliflower or sea anemone, and usually grow in clusters. Most dogs are asymptomatic unless the papillomas become infected. Infected oral papillomas can cause pain, [swelling](#) and [bad breath](#).

Diagnosis of papilloma virus in dogs:

It is always a good idea to bring your dog to the [veterinarian](#) if you ever notice any [lump or bump](#). Your veterinarian can usually diagnose canine oral papilloma by their characteristic appearance. Since oral papillomas can occasionally become malignant ([cancerous](#)) and other cancers can grow in the mouth,

your veterinarian may obtain a [biopsy](#) of the lesion to establish the diagnosis, depending on your pet's age. Likewise, your veterinarian will examine your dog's mouth to determine if the papillomas are infected and antibiotics are needed.

Treatment of papilloma virus in dogs:

Since canine oral papillomas are usually asymptomatic, treatment is often not indicated unless they become infected or become symptomatic. Infected papillomas can be painful and require a course of antibiotics. Occasionally, a dog will have so many growths that eating becomes problematic. When this occurs, the papillomas can be [surgically](#) excised or treated with cryotherapy (freezing). Another treatment involves crushing the lesions to stimulate the host immune system to attack them. In humans, interferon has been used in severe cases but this treatment is costly and has provided mixed results with dogs. Most cases of canine oral papillomas go away on their own within 1-5 months as the affected dog's immune system matures and mounts a response to the virus.

So while it's true that kissing can spread cooties, at least in the case of oral papillomas they typically resolve on their own. If you notice any strange looking growths in your dog's mouth or lips, take your dog to your veterinarian to ensure they are canine oral papillomas and not something more serious.

If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian -- they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.