



## Warts on cattle

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### Introduction

Warts occur quite commonly on cattle in Australia, especially on young cattle. Warts are contagious and can spread rapidly when cattle are in close contact. They are seen on both dairy and beef cattle. They are rarely serious and usually disappear spontaneously.

Warts usually occur on the head, neck and shoulders, but can be found anywhere on the animal. They are usually small and cause little trouble. In severe cases, large areas may be involved and animals so affected may not thrive. The warts will bleed if knocked and may become infected or flyblown. Warts may also occur on the udder and vulva of cows, on the penis and prepuce of bulls, and around the anus.

Warts reduce the value of hides.



*Figure 1. A beef cow severely affected by warts. Warts are less common on dairy cattle.*

### How warts spread

Warts are caused by a host-specific virus which enters the skin through abrasions. They usually spread by direct contact between cattle. The virus can be spread by ear-tattooing instruments or through scratches caused by barbed wire. The incubation period, that is, the time a wart takes to develop after infection, is normally three to eight weeks but may be longer. The warts usually remain for up

to six months and then disappear without treatment. Some last longer.

### Control and treatment

Isolate affected cattle to reduce the chance of spread. Warts can be removed surgically, or by tying a tight ligature around the base, depending on the number, type, size and locations.

If warts are interfered with, warts elsewhere -on the body sometimes also go away. Viruses escaping into the blood stream are thought to stimulate active immunity. This theory is the basis for the use of wart vaccines. Vaccine can be made from warts removed from the affected animal. More information may be obtained from your local veterinary practitioner. The effectiveness of wart vaccines varies.



*Figure 2. Common warts on the skin.*



*Figure 3. Common warts on the teats.*

Many treatments have been tried and some are claimed to improve the condition. However, as most cases disappear spontaneously, treatment is not usually needed unless the warts become infected or flyblown.

Technical terms to describe warts are - a single wart is a papilloma, the plural is papillomata, and the disease (warts) is known as papillomatosis.

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