Canine Papilloma Virus

Certain viruses can cause the growth of small round skin tumors commonly referred to as warts. Even though dogs can get warts, they are not caused by the same virus that causes them in humans. These are benign skin tumors caused by the canine oral papillomavirus.

Viral papillomas are round, but often have a rough, almost jagged surface-- like a cauliflower. They generally occur on the lips and muzzle of a young dog (typically less than 2 years of age). Less commonly, papillomas can occur on the eyelids and even the surface of the eye or between the toes. They usually occur in groups rather than as solitary growths.

These benign tumors are not dangerous. They should go away on their own as the dog's immune system matures and generates a response against the papillomavirus. It takes between 1 and 5 months for papillomas to go away. However, some of the individual papillomas may stay permanently.

The infection is transmitted via contact with the papillomas on an infected dog and it takes about 1 to 2 months for them to appear. This virus can only be spread among dogs, though, so it is not contagious to other pets or to humans.

In most cases, treatment is unnecessary; the papillomas will usually go away on their own. Sometimes, however, a dog will have a large number of tumors, making it difficult to eat. These can be surgically removed or frozen off cryogenically. Occasionally, oral papillomas can become infected with bacteria. Antibiotics will be needed in these cases to control the pain, swelling, and bad breath.

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