

By: Stefano Ambrosio Science Editor

## [Meet Dede, The Tree Man](#)

### *A rare combination of mutation and virus attack*

He may have inspired the Treebeard from "Lord of the Rings". But how did he get in this situation? First, it's about the human papillomavirus (HPV), a common human virus, is known especially as a leading cause of warts and cancer. It is also the main cause of cervical cancer (in uterus) (95 % of the cases). Due to oral sex, HPV can cause larynx, esophagus and oropharyngeal cancer (affecting the throat, tonsils and back of the tongue), at a rate which is higher than heavy smoking or alcoholism. This virus can also provoke periungual skin, vulva, vagina, penis, perianal and anus cancer and it is also suspected to cause breast cancer. Less powerful strains cause only warts. Benign warts. Is it so? In combination with a weak immune system, this leads to the whole body being covered with tree-like growths. This is the unique case of Dede, 35, an Indonesian [fisherman](#). The warty "roots" started developing themselves out of his arms and feet after he accidentally cut his knee when he was just 15. The growths spread chaotically over his body, leaving him incapacitated, unable to do everyday household tasks. And they are heavy! They grow at a fast rhythm of 5 mm per month and when Dede tried to cut them off, they grew back even faster! Jobless and abandoned by his wife, Dede had to raise by himself his two children in poverty. He joined a local "freak show" to earn a living, being presented in front of the paying audience alongside other cases of odd conditions, being the victim of abuse and ridicule in his own village, south of Jakarta. Indonesian doctors could not cope with his case, but Dede's relief could come from Dr Anthony Gaspari of the University of Maryland. Based on blood tests, he found that Dede's condition was caused by HPV. Dede was found to possess two rare genetic mutations that rendered inactive CD4 immune white blood cells involved in stopping the warts' growth. The virus could thus infect the skin tissues, triggering the development of the massive root-like growths, called "cutaneous horns". The low levels of CD4 cells in Dede's blood pointed initially towards HIV infection. Amazingly, with all his impaired immune system, Dede and his kids have enjoyed good health. "The likelihood of having his deficiency is less than one in a million," Gaspari told the Telegraph.co.uk. Gaspari believes that synthetic Vitamin A could stop the development of Dede's formations, as it works in severe HPV infections. [img=2] In 3-6 months, Dede could use his hand, even if it will still not look like a normal one. The most therapy-resistant warts could be removed through freezing off and surgery. "I've never seen anything like this in my entire career." said Gaspari. Discovery Channel presented the [documentary](#) about Dede's case "Half Man Half Tree", as part of the "My Shocking Story" series, at 9pm, on November 15th.