
What is herpes?



Herpes is a sexually transmitted disease (STD) caused by the herpes simplex viruses type 1 (HSV-1) and type 2 (HSV-2). HSV-1 causes fever blisters on the mouth or face, while HSV-2, typically affects the genital area. **However, both viral types can cause either genital or oral infections.** Most of the time, both viruses are inactive or 'silent' and cause no symptoms, but some infected people have 'outbreaks' of blisters and ulcers. **Once infected with HSV, people remain infected for life.**

Genital herpes is on the rise. One in five (5) Americans carries the virus for genital herpes. A Centers for Disease Control (CDC) study shows only about one in 10 of the 45 million Americans age 12 and older know they have the virus.

How is genital herpes spread?

Both types of herpes, HSV-1 and HSV-2 are transmitted through direct contact, including kissing, sexual contact (vaginal, oral, and anal sex) and skin-to-skin contact. HSV-1 infection of the genitals can be caused by oral-genital or genital-genital contact with a person who has HSV-1 infection. Genital HSV-1 outbreaks recur less regularly than genital HSV-2 outbreaks.

Genital herpes can be transmitted by people who are unaware that they are infected, or by people who do not know that their infection can be transmitted even when they have no symptoms.

HSV-type 2 infection is more common in women than in men because it is easier for men to transmit to women. Genital herpes poses the greatest risk to babies born to infected mothers.

What are the symptoms?

After being infected, it takes about two weeks for symptoms to appear. This is called the primary episode.

Usually there is:

- * Itching
- * Tingling
- * Soreness

Some individuals with HSV-type 2 infection may never have lesions, or may have very mild symptoms...

Next comes a patch of redness, followed by small, painful blisters which break and form into sores. The lesions typically heal within two to four weeks. Other symptoms that may occur during the primary episode may be a second crop of lesions, or flu-like symptoms including fever and swollen glands. However, some

people with HSV-type 2 infection may never have lesions, or may have very mild symptoms that they don't even notice or that they mistake for insect bites or a rash.

Most people with a primary episode can expect to have 4-5 recurrences a year which are most noticeable in the first year.

How is genital herpes diagnosed?

The signs and symptoms associated with HSV-2 can vary greatly among individuals. Health care providers can diagnose genital herpes by visual inspection, by taking a sample from the sore(s) and by testing it to see if the herpes virus is present.

Is there a cure for herpes?

There is no treatment that can cure herpes, but there are good treatments available and the disease can be managed. Antiviral medications can shorten and prevent outbreaks for whatever period of time the person takes the medication.

Can I get more information?

Ask your healthcare provider or call:

**STD Information via CDC-INFO
1-800-232-4636**

**National Herpes Hotline
1-919-361-8488**

COMPLICATIONS OF GENITAL HERPES

Genital herpes can cause recurrent painful genital sores in many adults, and herpes infection can be severe in people with suppressed immune systems. Regardless of severity of symptoms, genital herpes frequently causes psychological distress in people who know they are infected.

In addition, genital HSV can cause potentially fatal infections in babies. It is important that women avoid contracting herpes during pregnancy because a first episode during pregnancy causes a greater risk of transmission to the baby. If a woman has active genital herpes at delivery, a cesarean delivery is usually performed. Fortunately, infection of a baby from a woman with herpes infection is rare.

Herpes may play a role in the spread of HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. Herpes can make people more susceptible to HIV infection, and it can make HIV-infected individuals more infectious.*

* from CDC Fact Sheet on Genital Herpes

THE FACTS ON GENITAL HERPES

Here are statistics on this fast-growing disease from the CDC (Centers for Disease Control):

- * **Every year, about 1 million new herpes infections occur.**
- * **Herpes is spreading across all social, economic and racial boundaries and is spreading fast among teens.**
- * **Herpes is slightly more common among women, than men because it is easier for men to transmit to women than vice versa.**
- * **Herpes is increasing fastest among white teens ages 12-19. White teens are nearly five (5) times more likely to have herpes today than they were in the 1970's.**
- * **Most people with herpes have no symptoms and are unaware of their infection. A survey found that less than 10 percent of people with herpes knew they were infected.**

Revised April 2008



HERPES



HSV—Type 1 HSV—Type 2

