



GENITAL HERPES

What is genital herpes?

- Genital herpes is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by the herpes simplex virus (HSV).
- There are two main types of Herpes Simplex Viruses, HSV 1 and HSV 2. Either type may cause blisters or sores on the mouth or genitals.
- There is no cure for genital herpes and often people will have recurring outbreaks.
- During these outbreaks the infected person will have sores and symptoms for a while, then the virus will go into a dormant stage and the person will have no symptoms again until the next outbreak.
- It is still possible to transmit the virus during the dormant stages when a person has no symptoms.

How could I get this?

- Genital herpes is spread through skin-to-skin contact, usually during oral, vaginal or anal sex.
- Even people who don't have any visible sores or blisters may still unknowingly pass the virus to their sexual partner(s).

What are the symptoms?

- If symptoms of a primary outbreak occur, they will usually develop between six and 21 days after skin-to-skin contact with an infected partner.
- Many people do not notice a primary outbreak, making it unclear as to when they were infected.

Primary outbreak symptoms

- Small blisters in the vagina or on the vulva or cervix; on or around the penis or testicles; on or around the anus; or on the thighs or buttocks
- Pain during urination
- Fever and aches in the joints and muscles
- General feeling of ill health

Recurrent outbreaks

The number of outbreaks and the amount of time between outbreaks varies from person to person. Some people may have them frequently and others may have them only rarely. Usually occurs in same area as the primary outbreak. Itching or tingling at site of infection may occur. Less severe and shorter in duration.

How do I get tested?

- A swab of a sore or blister may be taken.
- In certain circumstances, and when available, a blood test may be done to test for genital herpes.

How is it treated?

- There is no cure for herpes, but effective treatments for outbreaks do exist. To be effective these treatments must be started immediately after symptoms appear.
- Antiviral medications are available and can be taken to speed the healing of blisters or sores and shorten the duration of pain and discomfort.
- Suppressive therapy (daily antiviral medication) is an option for those who have frequently recurring outbreaks.

Emotional effects of genital herpes

For many people, a herpes diagnosis can cause a strong emotional response.

People may feel anger, embarrassment, worry or guilt. Often, people will feel depression, fear, rejection or isolation. These are very common reactions and will not last forever. It is important to talk about these feelings with someone you trust, such as a health professional, a supportive person in your life or your partner. Many other people have felt the same way.

Are there complications?

Rarely, people with genital herpes may spread the virus to other parts of their own body with their hands. Transmission to the eye can be very serious. It is important to wash and dry your hands thoroughly after touching sores or blisters in order to prevent spreading the infection.

If you become pregnant, it is important that you tell your health care provider if you or your partner have genital herpes.

Remember:

Any infection in the genital area may increase the risk of becoming infected with HIV.

Practicing safer sex by using latex or polyurethane condoms and/or oral dams for oral, anal or vaginal sex can reduce the risk of sexually transmitted and blood borne infections (STBBIs).

Call the **Sexual Health Infoline Ontario** at 1-800-668-2437 if you have questions or need help.

For more information: www.sexandu.ca

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