

Genital Herpes

HSV

Herpes is a common infection. HSV stands for Herpes Simplex Virus. There are two common types of herpes virus. HSV 1 causes most oral infections that people call “cold sores” or “fever blisters.” HSV 2 causes most genital herpes. Both types can give you sores in either place. Having one type does not mean that you cannot get the other.

The virus is passed through skin-to-skin contact. This can happen through vaginal, oral, or anal sex. It is also possible to pass the disease even when there are no sores. Many people who have herpes do not know they have it.

It can be very serious if a woman gets herpes for the first time while she is pregnant. But millions of women with herpes have had healthy babies. If a woman or any of her sex partners has ever had herpes, she must tell her doctor.

People with herpes sores are more likely to get other STDs, such as HIV. It is important not to have sex during an outbreak.

Signs and symptoms

There are often no symptoms. If they do occur, they usually appear 2–21 days after contact with an infected person. Fluid-filled sores that look like blisters appear on the lips, genitals, inner thighs, or even the buttocks. They usually are painful and can itch, burn, or tingle. The first outbreak of sores usually lasts for 1–3 weeks.

After the first sores heal, the virus stays in the body. More outbreaks may occur later but it is different for each person. Later outbreaks are usually not as painful—the sores heal quicker and there are fewer of them. Some people have very few outbreaks or no outbreaks at all after the first one.

Testing

Testing the sores when they are new and full of fluid is best. There are also blood tests to see if a person has had herpes in the past.

Treatment

Herpes is a virus, which means it cannot be cured. But your doctor can prescribe medicine that may reduce the number of outbreaks and make the sores heal faster.

Prevention

- **Don't have sex during an active outbreak.**
- **Know your sex partners**—go with them for STD tests.
- **Use condoms correctly every time you have sex.**
- **Have fewer sex partners.** The more partners you have, the greater your chances of getting herpes.
- **Birth control pills do not prevent infection.**

Learn more about herpes

If you have questions or need more information, contact your doctor, local health department, or community clinic, or call the National STD Hotline at **1-800-227-8922**.

For persons with disabilities this document is available on request in other formats. To submit a request, please call 1-800-525-0127 (TTY/TDD 1-800-833-6388).