



Factsheet: Genital Herpes

What is Genital Herpes?

Genital Herpes is a virus, caused by the Herpes Simplex Virus.

There are two strains of this virus:

- Herpes Simplex Virus 1 (HSV-1): usually causes 'cold sores' on the lips and mouth.
- Herpes Simplex Virus 2 (HSV-2): usually causes blisters/ulcers on the genital area.

However, HSV-1 can also occur on the genitals, and HSV-2 can also occur on the lips and mouth.

How is it transmitted?

Herpes can be transmitted both when symptoms are present and sometimes when symptoms are not present through:

- Unprotected anal, oral and vaginal sex.
- Unprotected rimming (mouth to anus contact).
- Intimate/close genital and skin-to-skin contact.
- If a person has herpes on the mouth, (e.g. a cold sore), and performs oral sex, it is possible for his/her sexual partner to get genital herpes.
- If a person has herpes on the genital area, and receives oral sex, it is possible for his/her partner to get herpes on the mouth.
- Mother to Child transmission can occur during childbirth.

What are the symptoms?

A person can have the Genital Herpes Virus and not have any symptoms.

A person may show symptoms within days after contracting genital herpes, or it may take weeks, months, or years.

Symptoms can include:

- Painful sores, blisters or ulcers can appear on the vulva/vagina, penis, scrotum, near the anus, on the thigh, on the bum cheeks - virtually anywhere on the external genital area.
- Some people may experience a burning sensation when weeing/urinating or flu-like symptoms when an outbreak of herpes occurs.
- Symptoms can clear up by themselves without treatment (usually after two to four weeks), but the virus will still be present, and can still be passed on.
- Symptoms can re-occur, and this varies from person to person.

The Genital Herpes Test

If symptoms are visible, a swab will be taken from the sore or blister, and sometimes a blood test.



How is it treated?

- There is no cure for herpes.
- Prescribed medications are available to treat the symptoms of herpes, and reduce discomfort during outbreaks.
- If outbreaks are frequent a person may be prescribed anti-virals for the long-term to suppress the virus.

Prevention

- When sexually active, always use condoms and/or dental dams for vaginal, anal and oral sex, and for rimming.
- Get tested, and treated if required.
- Do not share sex toys, [or if toys are shared, use condoms on the sex toy, change the condom between people, remove it after use, and thoroughly clean the toy before using it again].
- Anyone who has signs or symptoms of genital herpes, or herpes on the mouth should not engage in sexual activity, as this is the most infectious stage. When symptoms clear up, the virus will still be present, and transmission can still occur.
- Make informed decisions: talk to sexual partner(s) about STI testing and using condoms, and get informed about the risks.
- Mutual monogamy (both partners test for STIs and don't have any, and both partners agree to only have sex with each other, and keep it that way!).

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