



## Genital Herpes

### **Q. What is genital herpes?**

Genital herpes is one of the most common sexually transmitted diseases in the U.S. It is caused by the herpes simplex virus (HSV). Genital herpes (HSV) is an STD caused by two types of viruses. The viruses are called herpes simplex type 1 and herpes simplex type 2.

Most cases of genital herpes are caused by infection by the herpes simplex virus type 2 (HSV-2).

Herpes simplex virus type 1 (HSV-1) is more often the cause of cold sores or fever blisters. But it can also be a cause of genital herpes.

### **Q. How is genital herpes spread?**

You can get herpes by having vaginal, anal, or oral sex with someone who has the disease.

Fluids found in a herpes sore carry the virus, and contact with those fluids can cause infection. You can also get herpes from an infected sex partner who does not have a visible sore or who may not know he or she is infected because the virus can be released through your skin and spread the infection to your sex partner(s). This is very rare but can happen.

### **Q. How can I reduce my risk of getting herpes?**

The only way to avoid STDs is to not have vaginal, anal, or oral sex.

If you are sexually active, you can do the following things to lower your chances of getting herpes:

- Being in a long-term mutually monogamous relationship with a partner who has been tested and has negative STD test results;
- Using latex condoms the right way every time you have sex.
- Avoid oral sex with your partner if you have a mouth lesion
- Don't have genital or anal contact when any sores are present.
- Wash your hands with soap and water after touching infected areas.

Herpes symptoms can occur in both male and female genital areas that are covered by a latex condom. However, outbreaks can also occur in areas that are not covered by a condom so condoms may not fully protect you from getting herpes.

## **Q. How do I know if I have genital herpes?**

Most people who have herpes have no, or very mild symptoms. You may not notice mild symptoms or you may mistake them for another skin condition, such as a pimple or ingrown hair. Because of this, most people who have herpes do not know it and therefore pass it on. You may also have an outbreak without seeing an “actual” lesion. Some common symptoms are burning with urination and vaginal discomfort/pain.

Genital herpes sores usually appear as one or more blisters on or around the genitals, rectum or mouth. The blisters break and leave painful sores that may take weeks to heal. These symptoms are sometimes called “having an outbreak.” The first time someone has an outbreak it is called a “primary outbreak” and they may also have flu-like symptoms such as fever, body aches, or swollen glands.

Repeat outbreaks of genital herpes are very common, especially during the first year after infection. Repeat outbreaks are usually shorter and less severe than the first outbreak. Although the infection can stay in the body for the rest of your life, the number of outbreaks tends to decrease over a period of years.

You should be examined by your doctor if you notice any of these symptoms or if your partner has an STD or symptoms of an STD, such as an unusual sore, vaginal pain/discomfort or burning when urinating.

## **Q. How will my doctor know if I have herpes?**

Often times, your physician can diagnose genital herpes by simply by examining you. They can also take a sample from the sore(s) and test it. Have an honest and open talk with your health care provider and ask whether you should be tested for herpes or other STDs.

## **Q. Can herpes be cured?**

There is no cure for herpes. But the symptoms can be lessened and prevented with treatment. Treatment can also reduce the risk of infecting others.

Your health care provider may prescribe antiviral medications (Valtrex) to help prevent or reduce the pain and discomfort from an outbreak of symptoms.

One of these herpes medicines can be taken daily, and makes it less likely that you will pass the infection on to your sex partner(s). Taking medication daily is recommended only if you have more than three outbreaks a year. If not, treatment consists of taking medication the instant you begin having symptoms.

Outbreaks usually come on during times of emotional stress or illness. That's because, during these times, your body's immune system may be less able to suppress the virus and keep it from becoming active.

Symptom triggers can include:

- Fatigue/Stress
- Illness/Fever
- Sexual intercourse
- Menstruation

As soon as you feel any symptoms of an outbreak you should start taking the antiviral medication. It is not necessary to schedule an appointment every time you have an outbreak. Over the counter Dermoplast spray is spray on medication that has a numbing medication called lidocaine in it. This may provide great relief and you can spray it on the lesions as often as you like.

### **Q. Can I still have sex if I have herpes?**

If you have herpes, you should tell your sex partner(s) and let him or her know that you do and the risk involved. Using condoms may help lower this risk but it will not get rid of the risk completely. Having sores or other symptoms of herpes can increase your risk of spreading the disease. Even if you do not have any symptoms, you can still infect your sex partners. Although this is rare, it CAN happen.

### **Q. I'm pregnant. How could genital herpes affect my baby?**

You need to tell your doctor if you have ever had symptoms of, been exposed to, or been diagnosed with genital herpes.

If you are pregnant and have genital herpes, you may be offered herpes medicine towards the end of your pregnancy to reduce the risk of having any symptoms and passing the disease to your baby. At the time of delivery your doctor should carefully examine you for symptoms. If you have herpes symptoms at delivery, a 'C-section' is usually performed.

