

Genital Herpes

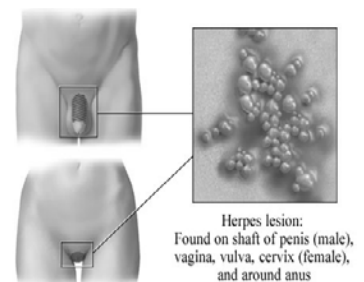
Genital Herpes is a highly contagious sexually transmitted infection caused by the herpes simplex viruses type 1 (HSV-1) and type 2 (HSV-2). Genital Herpes is most easily spread through direct skin-to-skin contact with open sores during oral, anal or vaginal sex with an infected partner; keep in mind, penetration orally, vaginally or anally is not required to transmit this virus. But you can also get the virus from skin that does not appear to have a sore.

Most people have no or few symptoms from herpes infection. When symptoms do occur, they usually appear as 1 or more blisters on or around the genitals or rectum. The blisters break, leaving tender sores that may take up to 4 weeks to heal. Another outbreak can appear weeks or months later. But it almost always is less severe and shorter than the first outbreak.

Although the infection can stay in the body forever, the outbreaks tend to become less severe and occur less often over time. Genital herpes can be passed to someone else even when there are no symptoms.

The most common symptoms of Genital Herpes are:

- Itching or burning feeling in the genital or anal area
- Flu-like symptoms, including fever
- Swollen glands
- Pain in the legs, buttock, or genital area
- Vaginal discharge
- A feeling of pressure in the area below the stomach



Herpes symptoms can come and go, but the virus stays inside the body even after all signs of the infection have gone away. In most people, the virus becomes “active” from time to time, creating an outbreak. Some people have herpes virus outbreaks only once or twice in their lifetime. Other people may 4 or 5 outbreaks within a year; outbreaks are hard to predict. Over time, the outbreaks tend to occur less often and be less severe. Experts don't know what causes the virus to become active. In some instances, illness or stress may lead to an outbreak.

Healthcare Practitioners can diagnose genital herpes by looking at the sores if the outbreak is typical and by taking a sample from the sore for testing in a lab. Some cases of herpes are harder to diagnose, especially between outbreaks. Blood tests that look for antibodies to HSV-1 or HSV-2 can help to detect a herpes infection in people without symptoms or between outbreaks.

Genital herpes cannot be cured; the virus will always be in the body. But the antiviral drugs *acyclovir*, *valacyclovir*, and *famciclovir* can shorten outbreaks and make them less severe, or stop them from happening. *Valacyclovir* (brand name Valtrex) also can lower the risk of passing the infection to someone else.

Depending on your needs, your healthcare practitioner can give you drugs to take right after getting outbreak symptoms or drugs to take on a regular basis to try to stop outbreaks from happening. Talk to your healthcare doctor about treatment options.

During outbreaks, these steps can speed healing and help keep the infection from spreading to other sites of the body or to other people:

- Keep the infected area clean and dry.
- Try not to touch the sores.
- Wash hands after contact.
- Avoid sexual contact from the time you first notice symptoms until the sores have healed.

Points to remember if you have been diagnosed with genital herpes:

- Sexual partners need an exam. Also, routine annual exams for women partners are recommended.
- If you have genital contact (vaginal, oral, or anal), consider using condoms or dental dams.
- Keep your immune system strong. Maintain a high level of wellness. Eat nutritious food, and get adequate exercise and rest. Do not smoke. Avoid drugs and limit alcohol intake.

Web links for more information:

- Web MD: <http://www.webmd.com/genital-herpes/default.htm> Family Doctor.org: <http://familydoctor.org/online/famdocen/home/common/sexinfections/sti/389.html>
- Mayo Clinic: <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/genital-herpes/DS00179>
- Planned Parenthood: <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/health-topics/stds-hiv-safer-sex/genital-warts-4268.htm>
- American Social Health Association: http://www.ashastd.org/hpv/hpv_overview.cfm

If you are a registered Millersville University student and you have questions or you need to make an appointment, please call Millersville University Health Services at 872-3250.



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