

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT GENITAL HERPES

WHAT IS GENITAL HERPES?

Herpes is an infection caused by the herpes simplex virus (HSV). HSV can cause sores around the mouth and in the genital area. HSV-1 is the usual cause of oral herpes, and HSV-2 is the usual cause of genital herpes. But either type of HSV can infect any area of the body. Herpes is very common. About one in six American adults aged 14-49 has genital herpes caused by HSV-1 or HSV-2.

HOW DO PEOPLE GET HERPES?

Herpes spreads through direct skin-to-skin contact. Genital herpes is easily spread in and around the vagina, penis, and anus during sexual contact. Herpes also spreads between the mouth and the sex organs during oral sex. People with herpes are most likely to transmit the virus when sores are present, but herpes can also spread when sores are not present. People often transmit herpes without knowing they have it.

SHOULD I GET TESTED FOR GENITAL HERPES?

During your exam, the doctor may take a sample from the sore(s) and test to see if the virus is present. This test works best when done within 48 hours of the beginning of symptoms. The test will not work if the sores have healed.



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Health and Human
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Texas Department of State
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For HIV/STD questions, call
800-CDC-INFO (English/Espanol)
888-232-6348 (TTY).

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HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE GENITAL HERPES?

The first symptoms of genital herpes often appear within two weeks of infection, but this can vary widely. Symptoms include:

- Sores, bumps, blisters, or a rash in the genital area
- Pain or itching around the genitals, buttocks, or legs
- Itching or burning during urination
- Swollen lymph nodes in the groin
- Fever, headache, or fatigue

The appearance of symptoms is called an "outbreak." Outbreaks usually last 2-4 weeks, but this can vary. Some people have very painful symptoms during their first outbreak. Others might not notice symptoms at all.

Many people have repeat outbreaks from time to time. The symptoms of repeat outbreaks are often milder than those of the first outbreak and tend to occur in the same place. Repeat outbreaks are hard to predict.

IF I HAVE HERPES CAN IT INCREASE THE RISK OF GETTING HIV AND OTHER STDs?

Because herpes causes open sores around the sex organs, it can increase the risk of getting HIV (the virus that causes AIDS) by providing a point of entry into the body. Herpes may also increase the risk of getting other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

CAN GENITAL HERPES BE CURED?

There is currently no cure for herpes. However, there are drugs that can make herpes outbreaks less painful and less frequent. Ask your doctor about these drugs. To aid the healing process, keep active herpes sores clean and dry. Do not touch other body parts with towels or washcloths used on the sores. Good hygiene is crucial because you can transmit herpes to other parts of your body during an

outbreak. Always wash your hands after using the bathroom or touching a herpes sore. Be sure your hands are clean before touching any area around your eyes.

WHAT ABOUT PREGNANCY?

A mother who has active genital herpes when she delivers can pass the infection to her baby during birth. This is most likely to occur when the mother is newly infected. Although this is rare, herpes can be very serious, even fatal, for the baby. If you or your sex partner has herpes, discuss it with your doctor during your first prenatal care visit. This is important even if you've never had symptoms or haven't had an outbreak in a long time. You and your doctor can discuss the best way to protect your baby.

HOW CAN I STAY HEALTHY?

The only sure way to avoid genital herpes is by not having vaginal, anal, or oral sexual contact. Remember, herpes spreads through direct skin-to-skin contact. Using latex condoms can reduce the risk of getting genital herpes. Keep in mind that condoms may not protect you if herpes occurs on a part of the body not covered by the condom.

HOW CAN I AVOID SPREADING HERPES TO OTHERS?

Do not have vaginal, anal, or oral sexual contact when any symptoms are present — not even with a condom. Sexual contact during an outbreak puts your partner(s) at higher risk.

Use latex condoms every time you have sex between outbreaks. While condoms do not provide 100% protection, they are the best prevention available for people who have sex. Condoms can also help prevent HIV and other STDs.

Talk to your partner(s) about herpes before having sex. Discuss what you will do to help prevent the spread of herpes. This might be a good time to talk about your sexual health and STD testing.

Where can I learn more?

KNOW MY **STATUS**.ORG

Go to knowmystatus.org to learn more about genital herpes and other STDs and find out where to go for testing, support, and treatment in Texas.

Genital herpes information from DSHS:
dshs.texas.gov/hivstd/info/herpes

For STD testing locations in Texas, call:
2-1-1