

GENITAL HERPES

What is Herpes?

There are two types of herpes. Herpes simplex type 1 (HSV 1) occurs most often on or near the mouth – often called a cold sore. Herpes simplex 2 (HSV 2) occurs most often in the genital area. HSV 2, also called genital herpes, is considered a sexually transmitted disease.

How do you get herpes?

Herpes is spread from person to person by close contact such as kissing or sexual intercourse. Hundreds or thousands of these tiny viruses are in each sore. Herpes can be spread from an infected partner who does not have a visible sore.

What are the symptoms of herpes?

Many persons have no symptoms or minimal symptoms. The first outbreak usually occurs within two weeks after the virus is transmitted. Some persons report flu-like symptoms with a fever and swollen glands. Just before blisters appear, there can be tingling or itching in the area. Then blisters develop on or around the genital area. Some patients have little discomfort but others find the sores painful. The blisters break open scab over and then heal. The sores can last 2-3 weeks.

Outbreaks

Some people have one herpes outbreak and never have another. However, some have repeated outbreaks. The virus becomes active again with the outbreak. Recurrences usually don't last as long as the first outbreak – usually lasting 5-10 days. Some people get an outbreak once a month and some people may have an outbreak once a year. Outbreaks depend upon the person. Stress, illness, vigorous sex, surgery, and monthly periods may cause an outbreak.

What is the treatment for herpes?

There is no cure for herpes, but antiviral medication can shorten the outbreaks.

How is genital herpes diagnosed?

A culture can be done by taking a sample from the sore when there are blisters and/or open sores. Blood tests can also detect antibodies to the herpes virus.

How can herpes be prevented?

The only way to avoid getting a sexually transmitted disease is to abstain from sexual contact or to be in a monogamous relationship with a partner who has been tested and known to be uninfected. Latex condoms can reduce the chances of getting herpes.