

Genital Herpes

FACT SHEET

What is Genital Herpes?

Herpes is an infection caused by the herpes simplex virus (HSV). This virus has two types: HSV type 1 and HSV type 2. HSV-2 is more often seen in genital infections, but either virus can infect you anywhere.

Who Can Get Genital Herpes?

HSV-1: About 70-90 % of adults have had a HSV-1 infection, a small cold sore on the lip or some other site on the body. Herpes is passed on to others through direct contact, because the virus lives in the fluid in the sore or blister. Activities like kissing someone or touching the blister and then touching some other part of your body or someone else's body can spread the disease.

HSV-2: Is mostly spread through sexual contact, from an infected person to their partner. Sometimes if a pregnant woman is infected with genital herpes she can pass the virus on to her baby during childbirth. It is important for her to tell her doctor so that the infant can be protected. Both of these viruses can live in the nerve cells. They cause infections and symptoms that can come back again and again. The disease never leaves the body and right now, there is no cure.

What are the Symptoms of Genital Herpes?

Symptoms include:

- Painful blisters on the genitals of women and on the penis in men
- Pain during urination

HSV-2, which often causes genital herpes, can cause symptoms about 2-21 days after the contact occurs. The first outbreak of these symptoms is usually the worst. If the infection is going to reoccur the skin blisters will appear at the same site. Often this can happen when a person is under stress or has an illness. The symptoms usually last a week or two.

What is the Treatment?

A drug called Acyclovir (Zovirax) is often used to decrease the pain and symptoms of herpes and to decrease the healing time. This drug is available from your doctor.

How Can You Prevent Genital Herpes?

You can reduce your risk of getting herpes by:

- Limiting the number of sexual partners you have
- Using condoms and rubber dams for all sexual contact
- Learning about prevention and control of sexually transmitted diseases
- Seeing your doctor if you have any of the above symptoms

If you have genital herpes you must tell your sexual partners of the infection. You should have no sexual contact if you have lesions. If you are female you should see your doctor regularly for a pap smear and to discuss pregnancy and childbirth options.