

The challenge of herpes



Herpes is a common and personally challenging disease

Herpes is very common. One out of four adults has genital herpes.

When people first hear that they are infected, many become upset. Because herpes can be transmitted from one person to another during sex, some people feel ashamed or guilty.

Such feelings are normal. But people with herpes do learn to cope with the disease. For many it becomes a manageable, occasional outbreak on the genital skin.

Telling sexual partners

Everyone with herpes must make important choices about their own sex life and that of their sex partners. They need to learn to talk with their sex partners honestly.

Telling one's sex partner about herpes may mean exposing a very personal side of oneself and risking rejection. However, this honesty is the key to a healthy relationship. Often the partner is grateful for the demonstration of courage.

When should one's partner be told about herpes?

First, accept the disease

Before talking with a partner about herpes, the person with herpes must accept that they have the disease, and they must learn all they can about it. The more one knows about herpes, the less one has to fear. The next step is deciding when to tell one's partner.

When and how to tell one's partner

It is best to tell the partner before starting the sexual relationship. If one waits until after sex has started, anger and lack of trust may result.

The partner should be told about herpes in a private, quiet place. It is important to be calm, direct, and confident. Telling one's partner about herpes is the right thing to do.

People living with herpes learn to be honest with their partners about the disease. They make careful choices about their sexual needs.

Many people with herpes have a good sex life.

**Many people
learn to live
with herpes,
tell their sex
partners, and
have good
sex lives.**

What is herpes?



Oral herpes “cold sore” on lip



Genital herpes blisters on penis

Two types of herpes viruses

There are two main types of herpes viruses: oral herpes and genital herpes. Both of these are very common.

HSV-1 (usually causes oral herpes)

- Is also called *herpes simplex virus type-1*;
- Is a very common virus;
- Usually infects people in childhood;
- Causes “cold sores” or “fever blisters” on or near the lips;
- Can be transmitted to sex partner’s genitals during oral sex.

HSV-2 (usually causes genital herpes)

- Is also called *herpes simplex virus type-2*;
- Causes sores on or near the genitals, anus, or buttocks;
- Is carried by one in four adults in their bodies;
- Can be transmitted to sex partner’s genitals or anus.

Some people have **warning signs** that tell them a herpes outbreak is coming. When people with herpes have sores, they are experiencing an **outbreak**.

The herpes simplex virus stays in people’s nerves for life. There is no cure for herpes. But having genital herpes does not mean an end to sex.

There is no cure for herpes. Once infected, both oral and genital herpes stay in the body for life.

How do people get herpes?



Herpes is spread by touching the herpes-infected skin of one person to the skin of another person.

- If you have active genital herpes and have sex, you can transfer the virus from your genitals to your partner's genitals.
- If you have a cold sore on your lip and have oral sex (put your mouth on your partner's genitals), you can transmit oral herpes to his or her genitals.
- If you have active genital herpes and your partner puts his or her mouth on your genitals (oral sex), you can transmit genital herpes to his/her mouth.

Some people may have active genital herpes, but have no sores. Herpes can still be spread even though there are no sores.

Many people are unaware that herpes can be spread when there are no sores.

CAUTION

How do people with no sores transmit herpes?

Sometimes people have active herpes virus on their genital skin, but **no sores** are present. This is called *asymptomatic shedding*.

Because people with herpes can infect sex partners when there are no obvious sores or symptoms, it is important to protect one's sex partner by always using condoms.

Using condoms helps stop the spread of herpes.

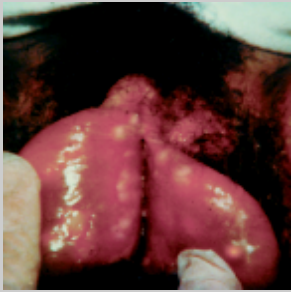
Definition: *asymptomatic shedding*

Asymptomatic shedding occurs when the active herpes virus moves down the nerves into the genital skin, but causes no sores.

People with herpes can infect sex partners when there are no sores or symptoms.

CAUTION

What happens during people's first infection with genital herpes?



First outbreak of herpes sores on woman's genital area.

First signs of infection

- Often when a person first gets infected, he/she feels sick for a few days.
- The sickness may be like the flu, with fever, headache, and muscle ache.
- Some people get very sick, and others may not be ill enough to see a doctor.

First outbreak

The first outbreak of herpes sores is usually the worst.

- Blisters or sores appear on or near the genitals.
- Burning during urination may occur.
- The sores can be anywhere in the genital area or buttocks. Sometimes they are on the legs or back.
- Often they are around the anus (*even in people who do not have anal sex*).

The first outbreak is the most dangerous time for infecting others.

Definition: outbreak or recurrence

When the herpes virus travels down the nerves and causes obvious sores in the genital area.

The very first time you have sores is the most dangerous time for transmission.

CAUTION

What happens during people's first infection with genital herpes (continued)?



Inactive virus



Active virus

Inactive virus

- After the sores go away, the virus becomes inactive.
- Inactive virus hides in the nerves of the spine.

Active virus

- The active virus travels down the nerves to the skin where it causes sores.
- When the sores return, they are usually fewer, milder, and heal faster than the first outbreak.
- Most people have outbreaks three to four times a year.

**If you notice
genital sores, do
not have sex.**

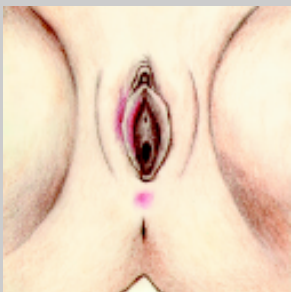
What are the warning signs of an outbreak?



Itching in the skin



Irritation or tingling in the nerves



Red patches in the genital area

Warning signs

- Warning signs often occur before a herpes outbreak.
- The warning signs mean that the herpes virus is active and moving down the nerves to the skin.
- Warning signs usually last one to two days before sores appear.
- It is important to stop having sex when warning signs occur.
- Another term for warning signs is *prodrome*.

Warning signs include:

- Itching, pain, or burning in the genital skin or anus;
- Irritation or “tingling” in the nerves in the buttocks, low back, or legs;
- Red patches in the genital area; or
- Itching and pain around the anus.

Some people have no warning signs and feel no pain before an outbreak.

Not all warning signs are followed by sores.

Definition: *Prodrome*

Prodrome means the warning signs that occur before a herpes outbreak.

Stop having sex when warning signs appear.

CAUTION

What are the signs of a genital herpes outbreak?



Swollen vaginal lips



Blisters on penis



Sores on buttocks near vaginal lips



Sore on penis



Sore on vaginal lips



Sore on thigh.



Sore near anus



Blister between buttock cheeks

There are several signs of a genital herpes outbreak.

Red, swollen skin

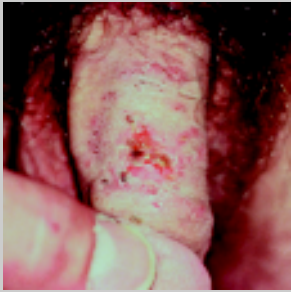
- The first sign is red, swollen, or itching skin.
- The active herpes virus has passed from the nerves to the skin.

Sores (*bumps and blisters*)

- When the virus is in the skin, single bumps or clusters of fluid-filled bumps may appear.
- These bumps can be very small. If they are around the anus or on the buttocks, they can be difficult to see.
- Later the bumps break open and become sores.
- Not all people feel that herpes sores are painful.

All the herpes sores are filled with herpes virus that can be easily transmitted to sex partners.

What are the signs of a genital herpes outbreak (continued)?



Sores and scabs on penis

Healing

- The sores scab over and disappear.
- Healed skin may be red for a few days.

Sexual activity *using condoms* may begin when the skin is completely healed.

When you have herpes sores, there is a greater risk of infecting your partner.

CAUTION

What are the **unrecognized** signs of a genital herpes outbreak

Many people have mild herpes symptoms that go unnoticed or unrecognized. This is true both for people who know that they have herpes and for those who do not know that they have the infection.

- Sometimes herpes sores may look like bug bites, pimples, jock itch, allergies to soaps or clothes, or hemorrhoids.
- Women who have herpes may think that they have frequent yeast infections.
- Sometimes herpes sores are not painful.

Herpes signs may look slightly different in each person. This is why herpes can be hard to recognize.

Because many people don't know they have herpes, condoms should be used with all sex partners.

CAUTION

How can you protect your sex partner?



Examine your own and your partner's genitals regularly. If you see or feel any signs of an outbreak, do not have sex.

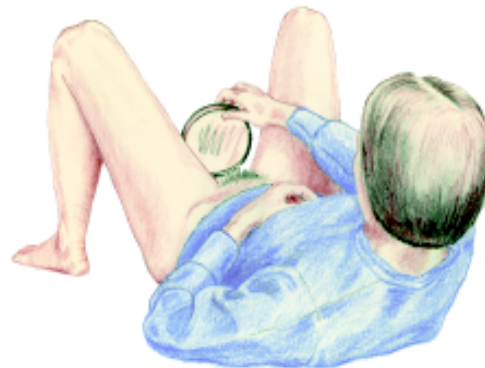
Herpes can only be spread through sex.

To protect sex partners from getting herpes:

- Tell your partner you have herpes before having sex.
- Do not have sex when you have warning signs or sores.
- **Always** use condoms when having sex.

Condoms

- Condoms lower the risk of infecting sex partners with genital herpes.
- Condoms are helpful, but not perfect. Condoms do not cover all areas where herpes sores may be present.
- People who use condoms regularly are less likely to get herpes.
- Female condoms are likely to protect against herpes. Less is known about how protective they are.



How is herpes diagnosed?

Herpes infections can be diagnosed in three ways.

Visual exam

The doctor or nurse looks for blisters or sores in the genital area.

Viral culture test on blister or sore

- Testing for the herpes virus is done to confirm the visual exam.
- A common test for the herpes virus is called a *viral culture*.
- A small sample of fluid is taken to see if there is HSV-1 or HSV-2 in the sore.
- The viral culture results can be negative, even in someone who has herpes.

Blood test

- As a reaction to the first herpes infection, the body makes antibodies. Antibodies fight the herpes virus.
- Blood tests detect antibodies.
- Antibodies may not develop until two to three months after infection with the herpes virus.
- The most accurate blood test for herpes simplex virus detects both HSV-1 and HSV-2 antibodies.
- If you're getting a blood test for herpes, be sure to ask your health care provider for information.

**Consider
having
yourself and
your partner
tested for
herpes.**

What treatments are available?



Once someone is infected with herpes, the virus stays in the body for life. There is no cure for herpes.

Treatment for herpes outbreaks

However, there is treatment for outbreaks of genital herpes. Listed below are three different medications to treat genital herpes:

Generic Name	Brand Name
acyclovir	ZORIRAX®
valacyclovir	VALTRESX®
famciclovir	FAMVIR®

These drugs are taken as a pill and must be prescribed. They can be taken to treat individual outbreaks. They can also be taken *daily* to reduce the number of outbreaks a person has.

When taken for outbreaks, these drugs can reduce:

- Length of the outbreak and
- Pain caused by the outbreak.

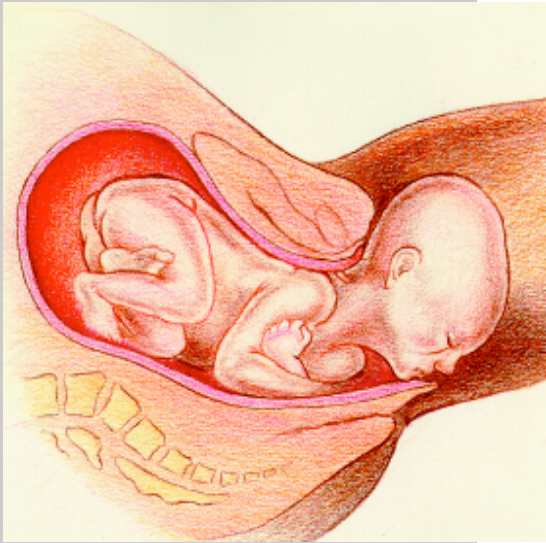
Other treatment to relieve pain

Pain from symptoms such as burning when urinating can be relieved in several ways:

- Taking additional medicine that has been prescribed by a medical provider;
- Relaxing in warm baths; and
- Wearing loose, comfortable clothing.

Talk to your health care provider about medication for genital herpes outbreaks.

How can pregnant women protect their newborn?



How can pregnant women protect their newborn?

Genital herpes may infect a newborn baby if she/he passes through the birth canal when the virus is present.

Tell your medical provider

During pregnancy a woman should tell her medical provider if she or her partner have herpes.

Get prenatal care

It is important to have good prenatal care. If your partner has genital herpes and you do not, it is especially important that you do not get herpes during pregnancy. Use safer sex during pregnancy to protect yourself and your baby.

Women who have genital herpes or whose sex partner has genital or oral herpes should be examined carefully for the presence of the herpes sores when in labor.

If a baby is infected with herpes, she/he can become very sick and die. The herpes virus can get into the baby's brain and cause brain damage.

**Tell your
medical
provider if
you or your
partner has
herpes.**

How can pregnant women protect their newborn (continued)?

Prevention during labor

If a woman is not sure if she is having a herpes outbreak, she can ask a medical provider to examine her during labor. This will help protect the newborn baby.

If there is no outbreak of sores, it is possible to deliver the baby safely through the vagina. If warning signs or sores are present, a cesarean delivery may be necessary.

Most women with herpes have healthy babies

There are very rare cases in which newborn babies get herpes during labor and delivery. Most women who have a history of genital herpes give birth to healthy, happy babies. Pregnant women who have a history of herpes, know their own signs of outbreaks, and tell their medical provider very rarely pass herpes to their newborn baby.

**Most women
with genital
herpes have
healthy
babies.**