

Genital Herpes

What is genital herpes?

Genital herpes is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by the herpes simplex virus (HSV). It causes herpes sores in the genital area.

Genital herpes is spread through sexual contact, or by direct contact, with the rashes, sores or blisters of an infected person. Herpes can also be passed to the eyes and other parts of the body by contact with sores or blisters.

A physical exam, medical history, and a swab of the infected area are needed to diagnose genital herpes.

Genital herpes can cause recurrent painful genital sores in many adults, and herpes infection can be severe in people who have suppressed immune systems.

Pregnant women can pass the virus to their baby during birth. In rare cases, babies develop herpes shortly after birth.

Herpes could cause blindness if the virus gets in the eyes.

Symptoms

Rashes or sores may appear around the area where the virus entered the body in 2-20 days after contact with an infected person:

- Mouth
- Cervix
- Anus
- Around genitals
- Vagina
- Penis
- Buttocks
- Other body parts

If this is the first time you have been infected, you may have a fever, flu-like symptoms, pain when passing urine, enlarged glands, itching, tingling and joint pain, as well as very painful sores and blisters. These should heal in 1-2 weeks, with no scars.

If you have been infected with HSV, the virus will remain in your body. When it becomes active again, the sores and blisters will reappear, but usually less painful and heal faster. How many times HSV can be active can vary.

It may be triggered by:

- Stress
- Weak immune system
- Injury to an affected area
- Fever
- Menstruation
- Poor diet
- Sunlight

Before an outbreak, some people have a tingling sensation in the infected area. From that point, until the sores have healed, the virus can be passed by direct contact with the "tingling" area. It is possible to pass the virus even when there are no visible sores. Up to 70% of cases are spread when there are no visible sores.

Treating genital herpes

There is no cure, but medication can reduce symptoms and speed healing of blisters and sores.

To ease pain and discomfort, keep the infected area clean and dry, wear cotton underwear and loose clothing, take pain medication, use bath salts, cold compresses and try urinating in water.

Wash hands after touching infected area.

Can I have sex?

Avoid sexual or close contact with partners until sores and blisters are healed. Always inform sexual partners you have herpes. Herpes is easily spread by direct contact with sores or blisters. Always use a latex condom during sex to provide some protection.



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