



## GENITAL HERPES

### What is genital herpes?

Genital herpes is a common sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by the herpes simplex virus (HSV). There are two types of HSV: HSV1 and HSV2. HSV1 is usually found around the lips and mouth and is often referred to as cold sores. HSV2 most often infects the genital and anal areas. However, both HSV1 and HSV2 can occur on either the lips, mouth, genital or anal areas. A person can be infected by both HSV1 and HSV2.

### What are the symptoms?

Many people with herpes never have symptoms, or symptoms may be so mild that they don't recognize them when they are either first infected or during recurrences of herpes infection. For others, the first infection can be quite severe with many painful ulcers (sores), abnormal discharge and pain when passing urine, muscular aches, headache and fever. A tingling sensation, itching or pain in the genital area usually occurs within 2 to 20 days after having sex with an infected person. This may be followed by the appearance of blisters that burst and become painful ulcers. The ulcers heal by themselves over time but may cause itching and take up to 3 weeks to heal.

After the first attack heals, the virus stays in the nerve cells below the skin and becomes inactive. It usually becomes active again from time to time, travelling back up to the skin and causing more sores. Stress, illness, fever, certain medications, exposure to sun, a new sex partner, pregnancy or menstruation may trigger a new outbreak. These outbreaks happen less often and usually do not last as long as the first attack.

### How is genital herpes spread?

Genital herpes is spread through direct skin-to-skin contact and unprotected vaginal, oral, or anal sex with someone who has the virus (whether or not they have sores or symptoms). Genital herpes can be spread to other parts of the body, including the eyes and from the mouth to the genitals during oral sex when one partner has cold sores.

If a pregnant woman has herpes later in her pregnancy, she can pass on the virus and infect her baby during or after birth. Talk to your health-care provider if you are pregnant or plan on getting pregnant.

### How is genital herpes diagnosed?

- Your health-care provider will ask questions about your symptoms, do a physical examination and may take a swab from the ulcer or itchy skin and send to the laboratory.
- There are blood tests available that may determine if you have ever been infected or the type of virus you were infected with.
- If you have genital herpes, you and the person(s) you have sex with should be tested for other sexually transmitted infections.

### Who is at risk of genital herpes infection?

You are more likely to get genital herpes if you:

- Have sex or intimate skin-to-skin contact with someone who has HSV.
- Don't use condoms or dental dams every time you have sex (vaginal, oral, or anal).
- Have more than one sex partner or your partner has had multiple sex partners.
- Start sexual activity at an early age.
- Have a weakened immune system that makes it hard for your body to fight off infection.

## How can genital herpes be prevented?

Individuals who are sexually active should:

- Limit the number of sexual partners and avoid sex with people whose sexual history is unknown.
- Always use condoms when having sex (vaginal, oral, or anal). A dental dam (a sheet of latex) or a male condom cut open should be used for oral sex.
- Avoid the use of alcohol and other drugs that might cloud thinking and lead to high-risk behavior.

If you already have herpes, you should:

- Wash and dry your hands carefully if you touch any sores.
- Do not kiss and have oral sex with anyone if you have sores around your mouth.
- Do not have skin-to-skin contact or sex if you have sores on the genitals or buttocks or have any herpes symptoms.
- Use condoms during oral, anal and vaginal sex to help prevent transmission, though condoms may not entirely cover the affected areas.
- Tell your sexual partner before having sexual contact.

## How is genital herpes treated?

There is no cure for herpes but there are antiviral medications (pills and ointment) available by prescription that will help relieve the pain and itching and help sores heal faster. Medication should be started at the first sign of symptoms.

During an outbreak:

- Wear loose fitting clothes and cotton underwear.
- Have warm baths: add salt or baking soda to the water.
- Eat well, exercise, and get plenty of rest.
- Keep the infected skin area dry.
- Reduce emotional and physical stress.
- If passing urine is painful, urinate (pee) in a warm shower or bath.
- Do not have any sex until the ulcers (sores) have gone.

## Further Information

For additional information, contact your health-care provider, Tele-Care 811, local Public Health office or visit the [government of New Brunswick website](#).