

Herpes — Herpes Simplex — Genital Herpes

Cause

Cause is a virus called Herpes Simplex Virus (HSV). Herpes simplex virus type 1 is found mostly in places above the waist. It causes cold sores around the mouth.

Herpes simplex virus type 2 is found mostly in places below the waist. It can cause genital herpes (herpes around the sexual organs.).

Sometimes type 1 causes genital herpes and type 2 causes herpes around the mouth.

How You Get It And When It May Appear

Type 2 or genital herpes is spread by sexual contact, including oral sex.

The **primary stage** usually starts 2 to 8 days after you're infected, but it can take much longer to begin. Herpes can be spread very easily when there are blisters or sores.

The **shedding stage** has no symptoms, but the herpes virus can be spread during this time. It can get into body fluids such as saliva, semen and vaginal fluids.

Recurrences may also result in blisters. Stress or being sick or tired may start a recurrence.

Being in the sun or having your menstrual period may also cause a recurrence. You may feel itching, tingling or pain in the places where you were first infected.

Herpes can be spread during recurrences.

Symptoms

Sometimes there are no symptoms. If there are symptoms they will be areas of tiny blisters on the sex organs. These blisters break open to form many small, very painful open sores. The symptoms often recur at irregular intervals.

Other Problems

Women can have painful urination, be unable to urinate, or if pregnant, can pass it to the newborn.

In the newborn it can cause eye problems, mental retardation, or death.

Diagnosis

Blood tests are often performed in a person who believes he or she may have been exposed to herpes virus in the past, but has no visible ulcers. Blood test can detect the antibodies HSV-1 and HSV-2. If one has a positive test for antibodies this indicates that the person was infected with the virus at some time in the past, although it is usually

not possible to know when or from whom the virus was transmitted.

The antibody response takes time. The results of the test may be negative during the first episode of genital herpes. Within three to four months after an initial episode, HSV antibodies can usually be detected. The antibody test remains positive for life.

It is possible for a person to have HSV antibodies indicating past infection even if they have no memory or history of herpes ulcers or blisters.

Polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test is a very sensitive test for identifying the herpes virus and cells and secretions for the urinary and genital tract. PCR test is more sensitive than the culture test, but is not routinely used due to its higher cost.

Treatment

There is a medication (either cream or pills) that can shorten the duration and lessen the pain of the sores. There is no cure for Herpes **Acyclovir** is a drug that speeds healing and can lessen the pain. It's important to see your doctor as soon as you think you may have herpes. Herpes is easier to diagnose when there are sores.

Be Informed

Condoms and foam can help prevent the spread of herpes. Any woman who has had

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Herpes and becomes pregnant should notify her obstetrician. If you have been told you have genital Herpes, be sure to tell your partner(s). Avoid intercourse during an outbreak. There is no safe time to have sex and not spread herpes. You can help protect others and yourself by avoiding sex if you have any sores or if your partner has sores. At other times, use a condom. The virus can be passed when you have no blisters.

Tips to soothe the pain

- Take aspirin or ibuprofen.
- Place lukewarm or cool cloths on the sore place.
- Take lukewarm baths.
- Keep the area dry and clean.
- Don't wear nylon underwear.
- Don't wear tight-fitting clothes.
- See your Doctor