

HERPES

PERSONAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

What is Herpes?

Herpes is an infection caused by the herpes simplex virus (HSV), either type I or type II. "Fever blisters" or "cold sores" are usually caused by HSV I, whereas genital infections are usually caused by HSV II. However, it is possible to become infected with HSV I or II in either location if there is direct contact with the virus.

What are the symptoms of Herpes?

Itching, tingling or burning are the first signs of herpes infection. This is followed by blisters which break and turn into sores that crust over and heal. During a first infection, you may have flu-like symptoms, swollen glands, burning on urination or vaginal discharge. The infection can be spread to others during the entire time one has an outbreak. Once a person is infected, it is possible to spread herpes to another without having symptoms.

How is Herpes spread?

Herpes is spread by direct skin-to-skin contact with an infected person. Oral herpes can be spread to other areas of the infected person's body (eyes, genitals), or to another person through kissing, oral sex or careless hygiene. Genital herpes can also be spread to other parts of the infected person's body (eyes, mouth), or to another person through sexual contact or through vaginal birth.

How long after exposure to Herpes can I expect to have symptoms?

Symptoms of herpes usually occur 2-12 days after contact. It is possible for these symptoms to be so mild that they go unnoticed. Most people are not aware of their infection with genital herpes.

Will Herpes come back?

Some people may never have another episode of symptoms, but most people will. Triggers thought to cause such recurrences include stress, illness, injury, certain medications and exposure to sunlight.

How do you avoid spreading Herpes?

- Learn to know your own symptoms. Avoid skin-to-skin contact of the infected area with another person until the skin has completely healed.
- Wash hands thoroughly after touching the affected area. Be especially careful to protect your eyes.
- There should be no sexual activity when you or your partner have herpes symptoms. Condoms may not always prevent herpes, but careful use of a latex condom during all sexual activity in between outbreaks may decrease the risk of herpes and other sexually transmitted diseases.
- Avoid kissing and oral sex when fever blisters are present.
- Herpes is **NOT** spread by toilet seats, telephones or whirlpools.

Complications and precautions

- Women with herpes may have a greater risk of cancer of the cervix. Have a Pap test at recommended intervals.
- A baby may be infected at birth if the mother has herpes, and it can lead to fatal infections in babies. Tell your doctor about your infection.
- Herpes of the eye may lead to blindness. Careful and consistent handwashing after touching affected areas can prevent spreading HSV to the eyes and other areas of the body.

What is the treatment?

Herpes infection cannot be cured. There are antiviral medications available by prescription that can decrease the symptoms or can be used to decrease the number of repeat outbreaks. See your doctor for specific treatment.

What can you do during a primary or repeat infection?

- wash hands thoroughly after touching sores.
- don't share towels and washcloths.
- wear loose-fitting clothing to allow as much air circulation as possible to help dry the infected area (wear loose cotton underwear, avoid pantyhose, tight slacks and jeans, sleep in pajamas)
- avoid sexual contact.
- women may find it more comfortable to urinate through a paper tube. Pour water over sores to clean.

DO NOT:

- break the blisters intentionally.
- apply antibacterial creams or ointments without your doctor's advice.
- soak the area without your doctor's advice.

DO:

- learn as much as you can about your infection.
- learn to control stress and diet, and get adequate rest.
- try to resolve your feelings about herpes--get outside help if needed.

HERPES NATIONAL HOTLINE: (800)227-8922 or (919)361-8488 METRO HELP: (248)258-4943

Content taken from Oakland County Health Division fact sheet

LIVINGSTON COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH, 2300 E. GRAND RIVER AVE., SUITE 102, HOWELL, MI 48843-7578
(517) 546-9850, www.lchd.org