

Genital Herpes

Can genital herpes be treated?

Yes. While herpes is not curable, it can be managed with medication. There are medicines that can prevent or shorten outbreaks. There is also medicine if taken daily that can lower your risk of spreading genital herpes to your partner. Talk to your healthcare provider about treatment options.

What happens if I don't get treated?

Genital herpes can cause painful genital sores and can be severe in people with weak immune systems. Do not touch the sores or fluids to avoid spreading herpes to another part of your body, such as your eyes. If you do touch the sores or fluids, immediately wash your hands thoroughly to help avoid spreading your infection.

Can I have sex if I have genital herpes?

If you have herpes, you should talk to your partner and let them know the risks. Using condoms may help lower this risk, but will not eliminate it completely. Taking antiviral medication

daily for herpes can reduce the risk of passing it to sexual partners.

Having sores or other symptoms of herpes can increase your risk of spreading the disease. Even if you do not have any symptoms, you can still infect sexual partners.



Can having genital herpes affect my pregnancy?

Herpes infection can be passed from mother to child during pregnancy or childbirth. Babies can also be infected shortly after birth, resulting in a potentially fatal neonatal herpes infection. If you are pregnant and have genital herpes, it is very important for you to go to prenatal care visits and talk to your healthcare provider.



How can I reduce my risk of getting genital herpes?

If you are sexually active, you can:

- Use a latex, nitrile, or polyurethane condom correctly every time you have anal, oral or vaginal sex.
- Know your partner's status. Talk to your partner about getting tested for STIs.

If you are in a relationship with a person known to have genital herpes, you can lower your risk by:

- Making sure your partner takes an anti-herpes medication every day.
- Avoiding having vaginal, anal, or oral sex when your partner is having an outbreak.

Be aware that the herpes virus can be released (shed) from areas of the skin that do not have a visible herpes sore. For these reasons, condoms *may not* fully protect you from getting herpes.

For more information, visit:
<http://www.bphc.org/sti>



Boston Public Health Commission
Infectious Disease Bureau
1010 Massachusetts Avenue
Boston, MA 02118
www.bphc.org
617-534-5611

What is genital herpes?

Genital herpes is a Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) caused by one of two types of viruses: herpes simplex virus type 1 (HSV-1) or type 2 (HSV-2). The most common type of genital herpes is HSV-2. HSV-1 more commonly causes infections in the mouth and lips (cold sores), but can also cause genital herpes.

How can a person get genital herpes?

Genital herpes is spread when someone has vaginal, anal, or oral sex with someone who is infected. You can also get infected through contact with:

- A herpes sore.
- Saliva (if your partner has an oral herpes infection) or genital secretions (if your partner has a genital herpes infection).
- Skin in the oral area if your partner has an oral herpes infection, or skin in the genital area if your partner has a genital herpes infection.

You will not get herpes from toilet seats, bedding, or swimming pools, or from touching objects around you such as silverware, soap, or towels.

It is also possible to get genital herpes if you receive oral sex from a sex partner who has oral herpes.

What are the symptoms of genital herpes?

Most people who have genital herpes have no symptoms, or have very mild symptoms. When symptoms do occur, herpes lesions can appear as:

- one or more blisters on or around the genitals, rectum, or mouth.
- the blisters then break and leave painful sores that can take a week or more to heal.
- flu-like symptoms such as fever, body aches, or swollen glands.
- tingling or scratchy feeling in your mouth and lips or between your legs.

These symptoms may go unnoticed or mistaken for another skin condition, such as a pimple or ingrown hair. Because of this, most people who have herpes do not know it.

Repeat outbreaks are usually shorter and less severe than the first one. Although the infection stays in the body for the rest of your life, the number of outbreaks may decrease over time.

How long can an infected person spread genital herpes?

Once a person is infected with genital herpes, they can spread it to anyone they have sexual contact with. People can spread genital herpes even when they don't show any symptoms.



Who can get genital herpes?

Anyone who is sexually active can get genital herpes. Having unprotected sex (without a latex, polyurethane, or nitrile condom or dental dam) increases the chance of getting genital herpes. In the United States, 11.9 % of persons aged 14 to 49 years have genital herpes.

How do I know if I have genital herpes?

The only way to know for sure if you have genital herpes is to get tested. Your healthcare provider can take a sample from a sore and test it. In certain situations, a blood test may be used to look for herpes antibodies.

Note: A herpes blood test can help determine if you have a herpes infection. It cannot tell you who gave it to you or how long you have been infected.

Where can I get tested?

Most health care providers offer testing for genital herpes and other STIs. To find a testing center near you, call the Mayor's Health Line at **617-534-5050** or visit www.helpsteps.com.

Can genital herpes be cured?

No. There is no cure for genital herpes. However, there are medicines that can prevent or shorten outbreaks. One of these anti-herpes medicines can be taken daily, and makes it less likely that you will pass the infection on to your sex partner.