

# Herpes Fact Sheet

## What is Herpes?

Genital herpes is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by two types of viruses. The viruses are called herpes simplex type 1 (HSV-1) and herpes simplex type 2 (HSV-2).

It is a common STI that any sexually active person can get. Most people with the virus do not have symptoms. It is important to know that even without signs of the disease; it can still be spread to sexual partners. Even though a person with herpes might never show symptoms or outbreaks, he or she can still spread it to someone who may then experience herpes symptoms and/or outbreaks. Having a sore increases the risk of transmitting herpes to someone, but it is not the only time a person can give herpes to another person.

Healthcare providers often can diagnose genital herpes simply by looking at your symptoms. Your provider can order laboratory tests can also be done including testing a sample from the sore(s) and a blood test. The Lenawee County Health Department uses visual exams to diagnose herpes infections.

## How is Herpes Spread?

You can get herpes by having vaginal, anal, or oral sex with someone who has the disease.

Fluids found in a herpes sore carry the virus, and contact with those fluids can cause infection. You can also get herpes from an infected sex partner who does not have a visible sore or who may not know they are infected because the virus can be released through the skin and spread to a sex partner (and you cannot see this happening).

Therefore, herpes can be spread by skin-to-skin contact. Furthermore, herpes can occur in male and female genital regions areas that are not covered by a condom, so condoms may not fully protect you from getting herpes.

## Symptoms of Herpes

Most people who have herpes do not have any symptoms, or have very mild ones. You may not notice mild symptoms or you may mistake them for another skin condition, such as a pimple or ingrown hair. Because of this, most people who have herpes do not know they have it. Symptoms may include:

- Genital herpes sores usually appear as one or more blisters on or around the genitals, rectum, or mouth. The blisters break and leave painful sores that may take weeks to heal. These symptoms are sometimes called having an outbreak.
- The first time someone has an outbreak they may also have flu-like symptoms such as fever, body aches, or swollen glands.
- Repeat outbreaks of genital herpes are common, especially during the first year after infection. Repeat outbreaks are usually shorter and less severe than the first outbreak. Although the infection can stay in the body for the rest of your life, the number of outbreaks tends to decrease over a period of years.
- If you touch your sores or the fluids from the sores, you may transfer herpes to another part of your body, such as your eyes. Do not touch the sores or fluids to avoid spreading herpes to another part of your body.



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## Oral and Genital Herpes

Oral herpes (such as cold sores or fever blisters on or around the mouth) are usually caused by HSV-1. Most people are infected with HSV-1 during childhood from non-sexual contact. For example, people can become infected by a kiss from or by sharing drinks with a relative or friend with oral herpes. More than half of the population in the United States has HSV-1, even if they do not show any signs or symptoms. HSV-1 can also be spread from the mouth to the genitals through oral sex. This is why some cases of genital herpes are caused by HSV-1, although most cases of genital herpes are caused by HSV-2.

## Treating Herpes

There is no cure for herpes. However, there are medications that can prevent or shorten outbreaks; usually oral medications. One of these medications can be taken daily and makes it less likely (but not impossible) that you will pass the infection on to your sex partner(s). The medication also lessens the chance of having an outbreak or shortening the duration of the outbreak if you do have

## Pregnancy and Herpes

If you are pregnant and have genital herpes, it is even more important for you to go to prenatal care visits. If you are pregnant, there can be problems for you and your unborn child. You should tell your healthcare provider if you have ever had symptoms of, been exposed to, or been diagnosed with genital herpes. Sometimes genital herpes infection can lead to miscarriage. It can also make it more likely for you to deliver your baby too early. Herpes infection can be passed from you to your unborn child and cause a potentially deadly infection called neonatal herpes ("neonatal" classifies conditions relating to newborn children). It is important that you avoid becoming infected with herpes during pregnancy.

If you are pregnant and have genital herpes, you may be offered medication to treat herpes toward the end of your pregnancy to reduce the risk of having any symptoms and passing the disease to your baby during birth. At the time of delivery your doctor should carefully examine you for symptoms. If you have herpes symptoms at delivery, a cesarean section is usually performed.

***This FACT SHEET is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information call your health care provider or call the Lenawee County Health Department at (517) 264-5238***

More Information: <https://www.cdc.gov/std/herpes/default.htm>



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