

GENITAL HERPES

(Herpes Simplex Virus)

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Most people who get herpes don't get any symptoms or get symptoms that are so mild that they think they are insect bites or irritation.

Some people do get very noticeable symptoms: painful, itching, and burning small watery blisters around the genitals or anus. Some people get flu-like symptoms, including fever and swollen glands. Others may get severe symptoms involving the rectum. When herpes is spread through oral sex, it can cause a very painful sore throat and tonsillitis. People with HIV with lower CD4 counts can have more severe symptoms.

When a person gets any of these symptoms, they are having an outbreak. Outbreaks will come and go and generally last five days to two weeks. They will heal on their own without medications.

If you're having an outbreak, you should avoid picking at the blisters, as it may spread herpes to other parts of the body (like your eyes). Sometimes the healing sores can also get infected by bacteria that live on the skin.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE IT?

Infection with the virus that causes genital herpes is common. The best way to know if you have herpes is to see a medical provider when sores are present (before they crust over or begin to heal).

CAN I CURE IT?

Herpes is a virus that can become latent (continued infection without symptoms). It can't be cured, but there are medicines a doctor can prescribe to treat the symptoms you might get during an outbreak, and to suppress later outbreaks.

Some people have long periods of time without symptoms even though they still have herpes. Other people can be infected without ever having symptoms. It is still possible to pass herpes to another person during the time symptoms are not present.

Having herpes may also increase your risk of catching HIV (or transmitting it if you are HIV-positive).

ARE THERE ANY LONG-TERM EFFECTS?

Because the herpes virus never leaves the body, people can have outbreaks for the rest of their lives. For many people, the longer they've had herpes, the less painful their outbreaks are.

If you have genital herpes, watch what triggers your herpes outbreaks and try to avoid those things. Common triggers include strong sunlight, stress and certain foods.

HOW DO I PREVENT IT?

Herpes is transmitted by skin contact; this means it can be transmitted during anal and oral sex, as well as by genital rubbing. The most infectious time for a person to pass herpes to another person is during an outbreak when there are sores present. This is a time when a person who has herpes should not have any sex. When the sores are gone, it is less likely that herpes will be transmitted, but there is still a chance. It is most common that herpes is passed when there are no sores since most people think they are not infectious at this time.

Latex condoms can protect the skin they cover, but skin (around the penis and rectum) that isn't covered by condoms could still pass herpes.

Condoms, if used regularly, do help reduce the risk that a partner will get herpes, so they are recommended even though they may not work 100% of the time.

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO FIND AN STD CLINIC NEAR YOU GO TO WWW.HIVTEST.ORG OR WWW.INSPO.TORG.