



Herpes Fact Sheet

What is Herpes?

- Causes small, painful blisters on the genitals, mouth, or anus
- Caused by herpes virus or herpes simplex virus (HSV)
- Comes in several varieties: herpes simplex I which usually causes cold sores and fever blisters of the mouth and nose (oral herpes); herpes simplex II which usually infects the genitals (genital herpes)

How is Herpes transmitted?

- Kissing an infected person who has a mouth sore
- Intimate sexual contact, including vaginal intercourse, oral sex, or anal sex with an infected person
- Hand or genital contact with the area where the sore is going to appear and with the sore itself until it is completely healed
- Contact with the rash-covered, infected areas of the body, whether or not sores are visible
- Transmitted from mouth to genitals or genitals to mouth through oral sex
- From infected mother to her baby during birth

What are symptoms of infection with Herpes?

- May not have symptoms
- Small bumps, blisters, and/or itchy, painful sores on the genitals or mouth
- Blisters that weep (secrete fluid) and then form scabs and heal, lasting one to three weeks before disappearing; may return repeatedly
- Itching and burning in the area where sores will develop, just before the blisters appear
- Flu-like feelings, such as fever, swollen glands, tiredness, and muscle aches, especially when a person is first infected
- Continued infection, even after the blisters disappear

What are other consequences of infection with Herpes?

- It can be passed from an infected mother to her baby during birth. Infected babies may suffer severe central nervous system damage and/or painful blisters anywhere on the body. If treated, the symptoms may be less severe.
- Herpes blisters are painful and unsightly.
- Once infected with the virus, a person will always have it.
- Symptoms may return.

What is the treatment or cure for Herpes?

- Can be treated, but not cured
- Prescription medications to relieve pain and reduce blisters during an active outbreak
- Prescription medicine to prevent future outbreaks

How can Herpes be avoided?

- Abstain from intimate sexual activity, including vaginal intercourse, oral sex, and anal sex.
- Have intimate sexual contact with only one person who is not infected and is also faithful to that relationship—for life.
- Reduce the risk of getting herpes by checking partner's genitals for any sign of blisters and avoiding contact if blisters are present. However, blisters may not always be visible.
- Latex or polyurethane condoms can reduce the risk when used consistently and correctly, unless the herpes blisters are on the area not covered by the condom.

If you have questions about sexually transmitted infections, call, e-mail, or talk to...

- CDC INFO: 1-800-232-4636 (English and Spanish; available 24/7)
- Hearing impaired hotline: 1-888-232-6348
- CDC e-mail address: cdcinfo@cdc.gov
- Parent or other trusted adult
- Family physician
- Local public health department
- Local AIDS hotline

These websites will also provide accurate information:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): <http://www.cdc.gov/>
- American Red Cross: <http://www.redcross.org/services/hss/hiv aids/>
- Michigan Department of Health and Human Services: www.michigan.gov/mdhhs