

Genital Herpes

What is genital herpes?

Genital herpes is an infection caused by the herpes simplex virus. The virus can cause painful blisters and sores on the genitals (sexual organs) and/or on the mouth. If you have symptoms, you need to be examined by a doctor or nurse and have lab tests done.

How is it spread?

Genital herpes is spread by having unprotected sex – not using a condom – with someone who is infected with the herpes virus, whether the person has sores or not. Herpes can be spread from the mouth to the genitals when one partner has cold sores and engages in oral-genital sex. Even very small breaks in the skin allow the virus to enter and start an infection.

What are the symptoms?

Most people with herpes don't recognize the symptoms. Sometimes, symptoms may not become visible for months or years. You can have herpes and not know it.

Symptoms of genital herpes can include painful red dots or tiny blisters on the genitals, swollen glands, fever, and body aches. Other warning signs include itching, burning, tingling and leg pain.

Usually, symptoms begin to show up two to thirty days after having sex with someone who has herpes. The first outbreak of blisters is usually longer and more severe than outbreaks that may occur later.

After the first outbreak, the virus withdraws into the nerves below the skin in the area where the sores first appeared. During this time, the virus does not cause symptoms and remains inactive. Once a person is infected with the virus, it remains in the body for life. In most people, the virus becomes active from time to time, causing repeated blisters and sores.

What are the complications?

Complications are generally rare and usually occur with the first genital herpes outbreak. Women who

are newly infected late in pregnancy can pass the infection to their baby during childbirth. If the virus travels to another part of the body, it may cause disease in that part of the body.

What is the treatment?

Medication is prescribed when herpes first develops or if the blisters continue to appear. Treatment will help to reduce discomfort from the symptoms, but there is no cure for herpes.

A healthy lifestyle, such as a good diet, rest and exercise, may help reduce the number of outbreaks.

To ease discomfort when you have symptoms, try the following:

- Wear loose-fitting clothing and cotton underwear;
- Soak in warm water baths;
- Keep the infected area dry;
- Do not use ointments or creams, medicated or non-medicated.

Important: Do not have sex until you and your sexual partner(s) have finished all the medication. Take all of the medication exactly as instructed.

Should I be tested for other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)?

If you have different sexual partners, or if your partner has different partners, you should also be tested for other STDs including gonorrhea, chlamydia, syphilis, and HIV (the virus linked to AIDS). You also should consider getting vaccine shots to prevent hepatitis B infection.

Please remember: The more sexual partners you have, the higher your risk of getting a STD.

Birth control pills

Birth control pills may not work very well when you are taking some antibiotic medicines. Keep taking your birth control pills while taking any medication, and also use a second form of birth control, such as a condom, until your next period after completing the antibiotics.

Ways to reduce your risk of getting a sexually transmitted disease

- Have sex with only one partner who has been tested for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), who has been treated if necessary and who is having sex only with you. The more partners you have, the higher your risk of getting an STD.
- Use a female or male condom every time you have sex. Condoms offer protection against STDs, but they must be used properly.
- Have regular check-ups for STDs.
- Decide not to have sex.

Important facts about condoms

- A condom acts like a barrier that helps prevent the exchange of body fluids, the transmission of sexually transmitted infections, and pregnancy.
- A new condom should be used each time you have sexual intercourse (anal, vaginal, or oral sex).
- Check the expiry date on the condom package.
- Use only water-based lubricants with the male latex condom. Oil-based lubricants, such as petroleum jelly, lotion or baby oil, can weaken and destroy latex.
- Female condoms are made of polyurethane. This material can be used with any type of lubricant, water-based or oil-based.
- Some lubricants contain chemicals called spermicides to help protect against unwanted pregnancy. If they irritate your genitals, don't use them.
- Do not use a male condom together with a female condom as the friction created may cause tearing of either product.
- If a condom breaks during sex remove it immediately and apply a new condom.
- Remember! Condoms do not offer 100 per cent protection from STDs and unwanted pregnancy. It will not consistently prevent transmission of STDs passed through skin-to-skin contact – for example, syphilis, human papilloma virus (warts) and herpes. However, if used properly, they are very effective and can reduce the risk of transmission of these STDs.

Putting on a male condom

- Take the condom carefully out of the packet.
- Place the condom on the tip of the penis when it is hard and erect, but before it touches the partner's body. Make sure that the rolled-up condom rim faces outward.
- With the other hand, pinch the tip of the condom to remove any trapped air, and unroll the condom to the base of the erect penis.

- After intercourse and before the penis becomes soft, withdraw the penis carefully, holding the rim of the condom against the penis, so that semen does not spill out.
- Slide the condom gently off the penis, and knot the open end.
- After using the condom, throw it in the garbage.

Putting on a female condom

- A condom can be inserted up to eight hours before sexual intercourse.
- Open the package carefully. Hold the small ring at the closed end of the condom between the thumb and middle finger.
- Find a comfortable position, either lying down, sitting with your knees apart or standing with one foot raised on a stool, squeeze the small ring and insert it into the vagina as far as you can.
- Put a finger inside the condom and push the small ring inside as far as possible. It is also possible to insert the condom by putting it onto the erect penis before intercourse.
- Make sure that the part of the condom with the outer ring is outside the body. The outer ring will lie flat against the body when the penis is inside the condom.
- When the penis enters the vagina, make sure that the penis is inside the condom.
- Immediately after sexual intercourse, remove the condom by gently twisting the outer ring and pulling the condom out, making sure that no semen is spilt and throw it in the garbage.



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