

## What is herpes?

Herpes is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by the Herpes Simplex Virus (HSV). There are two types of herpes viruses: HSV 1 and HSV 2. Both can be the cause of genital herpes. When someone has a sore from the herpes virus it is called an outbreak.

## How is herpes spread?

The herpes virus is spread through skin-to-skin contact. It is most likely spread when blisters or sores are present.

Some people with herpes never develop symptoms or blisters but can still shed the virus. This means that they can spread HSV to others without knowing it. Up to 70% of herpes is spread this way.

## What are the symptoms?

- Often, there are no symptoms
- Painful sores on the genital area (vagina, vaginal lips, penis, buttocks, and anus)
- Painful sores on the mouth or lips
- Fever, muscle and joint pain
- Swollen and sore lymph glands
- Pain when peeing
- Sores that come back several times within a year
- Herpes sores usually appear 2 to 21 days after contact with someone with herpes. The first outbreak is usually the worst.

## How is Genital Herpes diagnosed?

- Culture: Sores or blisters must be present at the time of the culture. A swab is taken from the sores or blisters and sent to the lab to see if the herpes virus is present. This is the preferred method for diagnosis.
- Blood tests can also be done. Talk to a doctor or health care provider for more information about these tests because in some cases, they may not be helpful.

## **How is herpes treated?**

There is no cure, but treatment options for genital herpes can include:

- Letting the blisters or sores heal on their own
- Medication for outbreaks when they happen
- Daily medication to decrease outbreaks for people who suffer from frequent outbreaks
- A doctor must order all medications used to treat genital herpes

## **Is follow up important?**

No follow up is needed. If you have any concerns, see your health care provider.

## **Things to Think About:**

- People with genital herpes are at twice the risk for catching HIV as someone without herpes.
- Some people have more outbreaks than others. Outbreaks can be triggered by stress, a woman's period, unhealthy eating, lack of rest, and illness. Exposure to extreme heat, cold or sunlight seems to cause outbreaks to return for some people. Others don't notice any particular triggers.

## **How can I reduce my chances of getting and spreading herpes?**

- Consider abstinence.
- People with herpes should avoid having sex (oral, anal or vaginal) when either partner notices the first signs of a herpes outbreak (e.g. tingling or redness in the area) or when blisters or sores are present.
- Use condoms/dental dam every time, even if you are using another form of birth control.
- Do not share sex toys.
- Talk to your partner.

## **To reduce your risk of STIs, get tested:**

- After your last partner, before every new partner
- After unprotected sex, injection drug use, snorting or crack pipes
- To help prevent STIs, get vaccinated against hepatitis A, B, and HPV.

**For more information please contact The Clinic at 519-663-5446.**

## **References**

<sup>1</sup>HerpesHealth.ca Retrieved from <http://www.herpeshealth.ca>

<sup>2</sup>Canadian Federation for Sexual Health Retrieved from [http://www.cfsh.ca/Your\\_Sexual\\_Health/STIs-and-HIV/](http://www.cfsh.ca/Your_Sexual_Health/STIs-and-HIV/)

<sup>3</sup>The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada Retrieved from <http://www.sexualityandu.ca>