



Genital Herpes Facts

What is genital herpes?

Genital herpes is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) that is also known as Herpes Simplex Virus-2. It is caused by a virus that causes painful blisters. Herpes can be spread to other people even when sores are not present.

How do you get genital herpes?

Genital herpes is spread:

- Through anal, vaginal or oral sex with an infected person.
- From a mother to her baby (during birth).
- Through close physical contact.

Can you protect yourself from herpes?

Yes. The best ways to avoid herpes are to:

- Not have sex (abstinence).
- Limit your number of sex partners.
- Use a latex condom correctly each time you have sex. However, herpes may be found in areas that a condom does not cover (ex: the thigh).
- Talk to your sex partners about herpes and other STIs.
- Infected blood or blood products.

What are the symptoms of genital herpes?

- Painful blisters appear in the area exposed to the virus (anus, mouth, penis or vagina).
- These blisters usually appear two to 20 days after sex with an infected person and usually heal within two to three weeks.
- Some people have first outbreaks so mild that they don't know it. However, the first outbreak is usually the most severe.

Other signs of genital herpes may include:

- Fever.
- Tenderness or itching around infected area.
- Swollen glands.
- Flu-like signs (nausea, aches, tiredness).
- Painful urination.

Blisters and other signs can come back. Some people have frequent outbreaks, while other people have them rarely. Call a health care provider or the Guilford County Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Division right away if you have any of these symptoms or if you have had sex with someone who has herpes or has these symptoms. Since the symptoms of STIs often resemble one another, diagnosis by a health care provider is the only way to know for sure if you are infected.

Is genital herpes dangerous?

The virus can be dangerous for many reasons. For newborns, it may cause mental retardation, nerve damage and death. It may also cause eye and skin infections. In women, genital herpes may lead to cervical cancer.

Is there a cure for genital herpes?

There is no cure for genital herpes. The virus will always be in a person's body. However, treatments are available to address the symptoms of genital herpes. Antiviral therapy such as topical and oral treatments may offer some control over symptoms. If you have blisters or sores, or have had sex with someone who has them, see your health care provider or the Guilford County Public Health clinic immediately.

Can you still have sex?

Yes. But remember:

- Tell your partners you have genital herpes.
- Do not have sex during an outbreak.
- Treating the symptoms of herpes may reduce the risk of passing the virus to others.
- Use a latex condom each time you have sex to reduce the risk of passing the virus on to others. Herpes can still be passed from one person to another, even though blisters or sores are gone.

Who can I call for more information?

National STD Hotline: 1-800-227-8922

www.ashastd.org

Guilford County Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Division

Greensboro or High Point: 336-641-7777

www.myguilford.com