



Genital Herpes Fact Sheet

Genital herpes is a Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) caused by a herpes simplex virus (HSV). Genital herpes can cause sores on the genitals (vagina, penis, and anus) and the skin around those areas. It is a very common STD in the United States – nearly one of every four adults are infected.

Q: How is genital herpes spread?

- A:**
- Herpes is spread by direct contact with infected skin or sores during sexual activity.
 - The infection is usually passed from one person's genitals, anal area, or mouth to a partner's genitals, anus, or mouth during vaginal, anal, or oral sex. A person with genital herpes may have sores or blisters. However, herpes is commonly passed to a sex partner when no actual sores are present.

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Q: What are the signs and symptoms of genital herpes?

- A: Symptoms of genital herpes can include:**
- Tingling, numbness, or itching. This sometimes begins a day or two before sores appear.
 - Painful blisters or sores on the genitals that may last a few days to a week or more.
 - Genital herpes infection lasts for life, although sores may come and go.

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Q: Can I have genital herpes and not know it?

A: Yes! About one out of four sexually active adults is infected with genital herpes, and most don't know they have it.

Some people have no symptoms, or have mild symptoms that they don't know are caused by herpes.

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Q: Is genital herpes serious?

- A:**
- Genital herpes is not usually a severe or dangerous infection, but it can be painful.
 - The first outbreak of sores is usually the worst. Recurrent outbreaks are sometimes linked to stress, fatigue, lack of sleep, menstruation, and genital friction (rubbing).
 - A pregnant woman who has herpes should tell her doctor so that steps can be taken to protect the baby's health.
 - A person with the open sores caused by genital herpes has a greater chance of giving or getting HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.
 - If fluid from a herpes sore is passed to the eye (by hands touching the sore and then the eye), vision may be permanently damaged.
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Q: How is genital herpes treated?

- A:**
- There is no cure for herpes.
 - There are several medications that can treat or prevent herpes outbreaks. Ask your doctor or nurse for more information.
 - Medicine for herpes can lower the likelihood of giving the infection to a partner.
 - For some people, the outbreaks are mild, and do not require medication.
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Q: How can I avoid getting genital herpes?

- A:**
- Abstinence (not having sex) is the only sure way to avoid infection.
 - Plan Ahead:** Think about protecting yourself. Talk about STDs and the need to protect yourself with your sex partner(s).
 - Use a male condom with each sex partner.
 - If a male condom cannot be used properly, the female condom can be used.


 **NOTE: MALE OR FEMALE CONDOMS ARE MORE LIKELY TO PROTECT YOU FROM GENITAL HERPES WHEN THEY COVER THE INFECTED AREA.**

- If you or your partner has genital herpes, don't have sex while sores are present -- but remember you may still get or give the virus when there are no visible sores.
 - If a male condom cannot be used properly, the female condom can be used.
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HIV IS ALSO A STD!

When you catch genital herpes, you could also be getting HIV.

Birth control pills or a birth control shot cannot protect you against genital herpes or other STDs.

 **USING CONDOMS CORRECTLY EVERY TIME YOU HAVE SEX CAN REDUCE THE CHANCE FOR TRANSMISSION OF GENITAL HERPES ONLY IF THE INFECTED AREAS ARE COVERED OR PROTECTED BY THE CONDOM**

Q: Where can I get more information about STDs and referrals for STD testing?

- A:**
- **Phone:** Talk to a trained operator who can answer your questions and provide information about STD testing. **In English and Español 24 hours/day, 7 days/week:** Toll-free: 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636); TTY for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing: 1-888-232-6348
 - **Internet:** Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/std/>
http://www.cdc.gov/std/healthcomm/fact_sheets.htm

Talk to your own health care provider, or call your county health department by looking for the telephone number in the phone book (white pages) under county government. Ask to speak to someone in the STD clinic or STD program for more information about genital herpes.