

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT GENITAL HERPES

Where can I learn more?

Go to knowmystatus.org
to learn more about genital herpes
testing and treatment.

Herpes information from DSHS:
dshs.texas.gov/hivstd/info/herpes

For STD testing locations
in Texas, call:
2-1-1



TEXAS
Health and Human
Services

Texas Department of State
Health Services

For HIV/STD questions, call
737-255-4300

or visit
dshs.texas.gov/hivstd

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WHAT IS GENITAL HERPES?

Herpes is a common infection caused by the herpes simplex virus (HSV). HSV can cause sores around the mouth and in the genital area. HSV-1 usually causes oral herpes, and HSV-2 usually causes genital herpes. Either HSV can infect any area of the body.

HOW DO PEOPLE GET HERPES?

About one in six American adults aged 14-49 has genital herpes. It spreads through direct skin-to-skin contact. Genital herpes spreads in and around the vagina, penis, and anus during sexual contact. Herpes also spreads between the mouth and the sex organs during oral sex. People can transmit herpes without knowing they have it, and transmit the virus with or without visible sores.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE GENITAL HERPES?

The appearance of symptoms is an "outbreak" often appearing within two weeks of infection. This can vary. Symptoms include:

- Sores, bumps, blisters, or a rash in the genital area
- Pain or itching around the genitals, buttocks, or legs
- Itching or burning during urination
- Swollen lymph nodes in the groin
- Fever, headache, or fatigue

Outbreaks usually last 2-4 weeks, but this also varies. Some people experience painful symptoms while others might not notice them.

Many people have repeat outbreaks, but the first one is usually the most serious and painful. The symptoms of repeat outbreaks tend to occur in the same place. Repeat outbreaks are hard to predict.

SHOULD I GET TESTED FOR GENITAL HERPES?

If you are concerned about herpes, there are different ways to get tested. The swab test for herpes works best when done within 48 hours of the beginning of symptoms. This test will not work if the sores have healed. During your exam, the doctor will take a sample from the sore(s) to test for the virus. If you do not have symptoms, a blood test can only confirm exposure.

Herpes also increases the risk of getting HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Talk to your doctor about the best tests for you, including tests for other STDs.

IS THERE A CURE FOR GENITAL HERPES?

There is no cure for herpes. However, medications make outbreaks less painful and less frequent. To aid the healing process, keep active herpes sores clean and dry. Do not touch other body parts with towels or washcloths used on the sores. Hand washing is crucial because you can transmit herpes to other parts of your body during an outbreak.

HOW CAN I PREVENT HERPES TRANSMISSION?

Do not have vaginal, anal, or oral sexual contact when any symptoms are present — even with a condom. Sexual contact during an outbreak increases the risk of transmission.

Use latex condoms every time you have sex between outbreaks. Keep in mind that condoms may not protect you if herpes occurs on a part of the body not covered by the condom. Condoms remain the best prevention available for people who have sex. Condoms also help prevent HIV and other STDs.

Talk to your partner(s) about herpes before having sex. Discuss what you will do to help prevent the spread of herpes. This might be a good time to talk about your sexual health and STD testing.

WHAT ABOUT PREGNANCY?

A mother with an active outbreak can pass herpes to her baby during birth. This commonly occurs when the mother is newly infected. Although rare, herpes can be serious, even fatal, for the baby.

If you or your sex partner have herpes, discuss it with your doctor during your prenatal care visit. This is important even if you show no symptoms or have not had an outbreak in a long time. You and your doctor can discuss the best way to protect your baby.