

# Genital Herpes

Genital herpes is a sexually transmitted infection caused by 2 types of viruses. The viruses are called herpes simplex type 1 (HSV 1) and herpes simplex type 2 (HSV 2).

Both viruses cause sores on the lips (cold sores) and sores on the genitals. HSV 1 causes cold sores on the mouth more often, but it's common for both types of the virus to cause genital sores.

## How do I get genital herpes?

HSV is spread through intimate skin-to-skin contact and oral, vaginal, or anal sex. It can be spread by people who have oral or genital herpes but don't have sores at the time of contact.

## How do I know I have genital herpes?

Symptoms of genital herpes can range from mild to severe. Small blister-like sores can develop in the genital area. Some people also feel very unwell.

Females may have burning in the vaginal area and notice a change in discharge.

Males may have burning when they pee and have clear discharge.

The first outbreak is often the most painful. Sores may take weeks to heal. Future outbreaks are often milder. Some people may have mild or no symptoms and not even know they have genital herpes.

You need to see a doctor or nurse to diagnose genital herpes. If you have sores, a swab will be taken and sent to the lab for testing.

## What if I'm pregnant?

If you're pregnant (or planning a pregnancy), talk to your doctor if you or your partner has herpes. Most women have normal vaginal deliveries. But, if you have an outbreak at the time of delivery, you may need a C-section.

## How is genital herpes treated?

There is no cure for genital herpes. It can be treated with prescribed medicine to help decrease symptoms and shorten outbreaks.

## What can I do during an outbreak?

Keep the area clean and dry. Use a clean towel and lightly dab the area dry after bathing. If it hurts to pee, pour water over the genitals while peeing. It also helps to pee in the shower or tub. Don't put creams or lotions on the sores as it can cause them to spread and get irritated.

## How can I prevent spreading genital herpes to others?

Tell your partner(s) that you have genital herpes so you can make choices to lower the risk of spreading the virus. Don't have sexual contact (oral, vaginal, or anal) while you have sores.

Use condoms and dental dams between outbreaks to lower the risk of spreading the virus. Condoms don't cover all of the skin that may be exposed to genital herpes during sexual contact.

The virus can be spread even if you don't have symptoms. This is called **asymptomatic viral shedding**.

Daily medicine can be prescribed by a doctor if you have frequent outbreaks. Taking daily medicine and using condoms and/or dental dams may help lower the chances of spreading genital herpes to an uninfected partner.

## For More Information

- STI/HIV Information Line: 1-800-772-2437
- [www.myhealth.alberta.ca](http://www.myhealth.alberta.ca)
- [www.sexgerms.com](http://www.sexgerms.com)



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