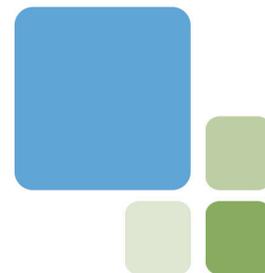


# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT GENITAL HERPES



## WHAT IS GENITAL HERPES?

Genital herpes is caused by a virus called the herpes simplex virus (HSV). There are two types of the virus: HSV-1 (usually oral herpes) and HSV-2 (most often experienced as genital herpes). Most people with herpes don't recognize their symptoms and don't know they have the virus. Symptoms can be very mild and might include tingling, itching, pimples or blisters that will crust over and scab like a cut. These symptoms can reappear (called a "recurrence") weeks, months, or years later. Anything that could weaken your immune system (such as illness, poor diet or sleep, emotional or physical stress) could allow a recurrent outbreak. Symptoms usually heal within two to 12 days, but can last longer.

## HOW DID I GET GENITAL HERPES?

Genital herpes is a sexually transmitted infection that is spread from skin-to-skin contact in one of two ways: by receiving oral sex from someone who has oral HSV infection or by having genital-to-genital or genital-to-anal contact with someone who has genital herpes. Although genital herpes can be spread by an infected person who has symptoms ("an outbreak"), it can be spread between outbreaks or when there are no symptoms (called "asymptomatic viral shedding"). In most cases, it is difficult to know how long you have had genital herpes and who gave it to you.

## HOW COMMON IS IT?

Genital herpes is very common. In the U.S., about one in six people ages 14-49 have genital herpes (about 50 million) and as many as 90% do not know they have it.

## HOW DO I GET TESTED FOR HERPES?

There are different tests available to diagnose herpes. If you have symptoms, a healthcare provider can take a sample of the area and do a viral culture test. Another option if you have symptoms is a DNA test. These new tests provide timely, accurate results (often in a day) and can detect both HSV-1 and HSV-2. If no symptoms are present, healthcare providers may order a blood test. Type-specific blood tests can also accurately tell the difference between HSV-1 and HSV-2.

## HOW CAN I REDUCE THE RISK OF GIVING THIS TO SOMEONE ELSE?

If you have symptoms, abstain from all sexual activity until they are gone. Since most genital herpes is spread when no symptoms are present, using daily medication can reduce the risk of giving someone genital herpes whether you have symptoms or not. Using latex condoms consistently and correctly will also reduce the risk of transmission.

## CAN MEDICATION PREVENT OR REDUCE OUTBREAKS?

Taking daily antiviral medication (called "suppressive therapy") can reduce the number and severity of outbreaks. Taking antiviral medication only when symptoms appear (called "episodic therapy") can shorten the length of the outbreak.

## WHAT IF I HAVE EMOTIONAL OR SOCIAL EFFECTS FROM HAVING GENITAL HERPES?

Myths about the virus are common, and so getting accurate information and emotional support will help you overcome any potential anxiety that some experience. Herpes is a common, manageable virus that anyone who has ever had sex could have. Individuals with herpes can have the same loving relationships that anyone can.

## HOW DO I TALK TO A PARTNER ABOUT GENITAL HERPES?

Everyone with genital herpes is encouraged to tell their sex partners that they have genital herpes *before* starting a sexual relationship. Be calm, confident, honest, and make it a two-way discussion. Encourage a partner to get facts and be tested for genital herpes to see if they already have it.

## ARE THERE PREGNANCY AND CHILDBIRTH RISKS?

It is uncommon for herpes to cause problems with pregnancy. Still, herpes can be passed to a baby during delivery, so talking to your healthcare provider about it is important. The highest risk for the baby is when a woman first gets herpes late in pregnancy. A pregnant woman who does not have herpes, and who has a sexual partner with genital or oral herpes is encouraged to avoid intercourse or receiving oral sex during the third trimester.

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