

very rare. Most pregnant women with herpes have healthy babies. The greatest risk to pregnancy is when a pregnant woman first gets herpes during the last few months of pregnancy. If you or your partner is pregnant and either of you has herpes, talk to your healthcare provider.

Herpes doesn't necessarily mean someone cheated

FACT: If someone has herpes, it does not mean that he or she cheated or that a partner cheated. A man or woman can have genital herpes for many months or even years without knowing it. A person could have gotten herpes recently or a long time ago and just not know it. A person can also pass it to someone else without knowing.

Cold sores and fever blisters are actually herpes

FACT: Cold sores and fever blisters on or around the mouth are caused by the herpes virus. This is called oral herpes. Most people get oral herpes as children when they kiss a parent, relative or friend. Someone with oral herpes can pass the virus to another person's genitals by touching the other person's genitals with their mouth (oral sex).

WHICH TEST IS RIGHT FOR ME?

- It's best to see a healthcare provider as soon as you notice something.
- A provider can take a swab from a symptom. This test won't work if symptoms have already started to heal.
- If you don't have symptoms or they go away before you can get to a healthcare provider, you can get a blood test.
- Not all blood tests are accurate. The most accurate blood tests for herpes are "type-specific IgG blood tests."



Latex condoms, when used consistently and correctly, are effective at reducing the risk of transmission of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. To reduce risk of transmission of herpes, couples should abstain from sexual intercourse during an outbreak.

STI Resource Center
Monday - Friday, 9 am to 6 pm ET
919-361-8488

www.ashasexualhealth.org
www.iwannaknow.org (for teens)
www.quierosaber.org (en español)
www.nccc-online.org

The American Sexual Health Association (ASHA) promotes the sexual health of individuals, families and communities by advocating sound policies and practices and educating the public, professionals and policy makers, in order to foster healthy sexual behaviors and relationships and prevent adverse health outcomes.

If you are a healthcare provider and would like to see our full range of available materials, please visit our online catalog at www.ashapublications.org or call ASHA Customer Service at 1-800-783-9877 or email us at customerservice@ashasexualhealth.org.



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HERPES

WHAT'S TRUE AND WHAT'S FALSE



AMERICAN SEXUAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

WHAT'S TRUE AND WHAT'S FALSE

Herpes is a common and usually mild infection caused by the herpes simplex virus (HSV). It can cause cold sores on the mouth or face (called oral herpes) as well as symptoms around the genitals, butt and thighs (called genital herpes).

Anyone who has ever kissed can get oral herpes. Anyone who has ever had any type of sex can get genital herpes. Genital herpes is a sexually transmitted infection (STI).

Many people have heard things about herpes that are not true. Here, we talk about what information is true and what's false.

Anyone who is sexually active can get genital herpes

FACT: Anyone who has ever had sex can get genital herpes. It's not about being clean or dirty, bad or good. It's about being sexually active. A person can

get genital herpes if they receive oral sex, if they have vaginal sex, if they have anal sex, or if their genitals touch another person's genitals. About 1 out of 6 people in the United States have genital herpes.

People often don't know they have genital herpes

FACT: Most people who have herpes do not realize it. As many as 90% of people who have genital herpes do not know they have it because they have very mild symptoms or no symptoms at all. Many people have symptoms, but don't recognize they are from herpes.

Herpes testing is not part of standard testing

FACT: Pap tests, routine physical exams and most STI screenings do not check for herpes. A Pap test for women does not check for STIs like herpes, nor does a pelvic exam. Most STI screenings do not include tests for herpes. If you want to get a test for herpes, you should request it specifically. If a person has symptoms of genital herpes, getting a viral culture (swab) is best. If there are no

symptoms present, a blood test can be done. Request a type-specific IgG blood test.

Herpes can't be diagnosed by a visual exam—you need to have a test

FACT: A person—including a healthcare provider—can't tell if a skin condition is herpes just by looking at it. Genital herpes can look like lots of things, like an ingrown hair, acne, bug bite, yeast infection or jock itch. Symptoms can also look like a bump, rash, pimple, sore or blister. Symptoms don't have to be painful and may or may not itch. Also, symptoms do not only show around the penis or vagina, but can also be around the thighs, pubic hair, butt or anus – anywhere a pair of boxer shorts could cover. Getting tested is best.

Genital herpes can be confused with:

- Yeast infection
- Urinary tract infection
- Jock itch
- Ingrown hair
- Acne or pimples
- Zipper burn
- Hemorrhoids
- Heat rash
- Bug or spider bite
- Allergies or irritations from shaving, sex or tight clothing

A negative blood test or negative culture doesn't always mean you don't have herpes

FACT: Negative blood tests or cultures can be right, but they can also be wrong. It's possible for someone to get a false negative blood test result or a false negative culture result. It's best to wait at least three months before getting a blood test. For a culture, it's best to get to the doctor as soon as possible before symptoms start to heal.

Herpes can't be cured, but it can be treated

FACT: While there is no cure for herpes, it can be treated. Herpes does not attack the body and usually gets better with time. While medications don't have to be taken, they can be very helpful. There are currently three medications approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for genital herpes. They are famciclovir, valacyclovir and

acyclovir. Each can be taken to help shorten an outbreak. Famciclovir has been proven to help shorten an outbreak when taken for just one day. Some medications can also be taken on a daily basis to help reduce the chances of outbreaks coming back.

Herpes is not passed through toilet seats

FACT: Herpes is not passed through contact with objects like toilet seats, towels, furniture or clothes. The virus also cannot travel in swimming pools, baths or hot tubs. Herpes is not passed through regular contact with friends, roommates, co-workers, or family members. People get genital herpes through some type of sexual activity.

Herpes is also not passed through blood

FACT: Herpes is not present in the blood. A person with herpes can donate blood. Genital herpes is only passed through direct skin-to-skin contact to the genital area.

Condoms can help reduce the risk of getting genital herpes

FACT: Condoms have been proven to reduce the risk of passing or getting herpes. Condoms also reduce the risk of contracting other sexually transmitted infections. While latex condoms are the most common, if someone happens to be allergic to latex, there are condoms made from other materials.

Herpes can be passed even when there are no symptoms

FACT: The virus can be passed when it is on the skin. This can be when symptoms are there, like itching, tingling or visible signs, but also when symptoms aren't there (called asymptomatic shedding). Someone with herpes is not always contagious, but a person wouldn't know when they are contagious without symptoms.

Treatment can help reduce the risk of passing herpes

FACT: Famciclovir, valacyclovir or acyclovir can reduce the number of outbreaks and the number of days the virus can be present without symptoms. Valacyclovir is approved by the FDA to reduce the risk of passing genital herpes to a sexual partner by as much as 50%.

People with herpes can have children

FACT: A man or woman with genital herpes can have children. While it is possible for a woman with genital herpes to pass on the virus to an infant during birth, causing a serious condition called neonatal herpes, this is



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