

GENITAL HERPES

Herpes is an infection caused by one of two types of viruses: HSV (herpes simplex virus) Type 1 or HSV Type 2. Type 1 generally causes infections in the lip, mouth, and facial areas (“cold sores”), whereas Type 2 usually infects the genital area. Herpes is one of the most common sexually transmitted diseases. HSV remains in certain nerve cells of the infected person for life. An active herpes infection can be passed from mother to child during childbirth. The virus may enter the baby’s bloodstream and can cause permanent brain damage.

Symptoms

Early symptoms of a herpes infection may include a burning sensation, tingling, or itching of the genitals. This begins 2–14 days after sexual contact with an infected person.

Within 2 to 20 days after exposure to the virus, one or a group of fluid-filled blisters may appear on the genital area. These appear

- In women:
 - Around and in the vagina
 - On the cervix
 - On the thighs
 - On the buttocks
- In men:
 - On the penis
 - In the urethra
 - On the thighs
 - On the buttocks
 - Around the anus

The lesions are often accompanied by flu-like symptoms such as fever, headache, swollen lymph glands, muscular aches, and fatigue.

Expected Course

The sores are usually healed within 2–6 weeks. However, outbreaks may occur throughout an infected person’s life.

Treatment

Although there is no cure currently, the following treatment may help:

- 200 mg acyclovir 5 times per day for 7–10 days (must be started within 6 days of the appearance of sores)
- Famcyclovir may help prevent future outbreaks
- Valacyclovir treats later episodes of genital herpes.

- Sitz baths 2–3 times per day
- Pain medication (Tylenol; Advil)

In addition:

- Keep the genital area extremely clean and dry.
- Avoid tight-fitting pants or jeans. Cotton underwear is recommended.
- Avoid using antibacterial creams or ointments.
- Do not pick or scratch lesions.

Emotional Effects

Genital herpes is not a serious disease, but it can affect your self-esteem or lead to depression. Ask for help; you can learn to live with the disease and to treat it properly. Information is available from the Herpes Resource Center (1-800-227-8922).

Prevention

The sores associated with genital herpes shed virus; sexual contact should be avoided while sores are present. The use of condoms can help prevent infection. Be sure to tell any sexual partners about your infection, and ask about any sores you may observe on your partner.

When you are diagnosed with herpes, you should have an examination to determine whether you also contracted any other sexually transmitted diseases.

Contact Our Office if

- Your symptoms worsen.
- You have any additional questions or concerns.