

FACT SHEET

Herpes

What is Herpes?

Herpes is a sexually transmitted infection caused by the herpes simplex virus (HSV), either type I or type II. Genital herpes is characterized by painful lesions/blisters on the genitals.

How is it spread?

Herpes is spread by direct skin-to-skin contact with an infected person. Oral herpes (cold sores) can be spread to other areas of the infected person's body (eyes, genitals, etc.) or to another person through kissing or oral sex. Genital herpes can also be spread to other parts of the infected person's body (eyes, mouth, etc.) or to another person through sexual contact or through vaginal birth.

What are the symptoms?

- Itching and burning
- Presence of blisters
- Flu-like symptoms
- Swollen glands
- Genital burning while urinating
- Vaginal discharge

How is it prevented?

Avoid sexual activity when you or your partner have herpes symptoms. The virus can, however, spread even when no lesions are visible. Condoms may not prevent herpes. Avoid kissing and oral sex when fever blisters are present.

How is it treated?

Herpes infection cannot be cured. There is medication that can decrease the symptoms and number of repeat outbreaks. Medications can also be used to reduce the risk of spreading HSV to your sexual partner. See your doctor for specific treatment.

This fact sheet is for informational purposes only and is not intended for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information contact your health care provider or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at www.cdc.gov.