

# Herpes

(caused by herpes simplex virus types 1 and 2 – HSV)

## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Most people may never develop symptoms or the symptoms are too mild to notice.
- Develop within 2-30 days, or longer, or not at all.
- Small, painful fluid-filled blisters on genitals, mouth or anus.
- Blisters progress to open sores that crust over and heal within 1-2 weeks.
- Blisters may be “hidden” in the vagina.
- First episode most severe, subsequent episodes milder.
- Itching or burning on skin in area where blisters are about to appear.
- Initial infection often accompanied by fever, headache and swollen lymph nodes.
- Blisters go away, but infection is still in the body.
- Blisters can return periodically, but usually with shorter duration and less severity.

## TRANSMISSION

Genital herpes is spread by:

- Vaginal sex
- Oral sex
- Anal sex
- Contact with infected person’s lesions
- Infected mother to newborn

Herpes can also be spread from one area of the body to another via contact with or touching an infected area.

Viral shedding may occur in the absence of blisters, so transmission is possible when lesions are absent. Most transmission occurs in absence of sores.

## COMPLICATIONS

Genital herpes can:

- Spread to sex partners
- Make infection by other germs, like HIV, easier, as the blisters provide easy entry to other STD germs
- Cause recurrent painful outbreaks

Genital herpes and pregnancy

- Most pregnant women with recurrent genital herpes deliver normal infants.
- Newborn may acquire infection from mother during delivery.
- Infection in newborn may cause death, or severe damage to the brain, lungs and liver.
- Risk is highest for infants born to mothers who have first episode of genital herpes during pregnancy.

## PREVENTION

- Avoiding vaginal, oral or anal sex is the best way to prevent STDs.
- Latex condoms, when used consistently and correctly, can reduce the risk of genital herpes only when the infected areas are covered or protected by the condom.
- Always use latex condoms during vaginal and anal sex.
- Use a latex condom for oral sex on a penis.
- Use a latex barrier (dental dam or condom cut in half) for oral sex on a vagina or anus.
- Limit the number of sex partners.
- Notify sex partners immediately if infected.
- When pregnant, inform doctor if previously infected with herpes.
- Never have sex with someone who has genital herpes when sores are present.

## TESTING AND TREATMENT

- Get a test from a medical provider if infection is suspected.
- No cure is available; infection persists for life.
- Recurrent episodes of blisters can be decreased by taking an antiviral medication each day.
- Treatment of recurrent episodes generally shortens the length of outbreaks.
- Comfort measures are available for recurrent episodes.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

Minnesota Department of Health  
 STD and HIV Section  
 (651) 201-5414; (651) 201-5797 TTY  
[www.health.state.mn.us/std](http://www.health.state.mn.us/std)

Minnesota Family Planning and STD Hotline  
 1-800-783-2287 Voice/TTY; (651) 645-9360 (Metro)  
[www.sexualhealthmn.org](http://www.sexualhealthmn.org)

American Social Health Association (ASHA)  
[www.ashastd.org](http://www.ashastd.org)

CDC National STD and AIDS Hotlines  
 1-800-CDC-INFO; 1-888-232-6348 TTY  
[www.cdc.gov/std](http://www.cdc.gov/std)

