

## Can Herpes Increase the Risk of Getting HIV?

Because herpes causes open sores in the genital area, it can increase the risk of acquiring HIV (the virus that causes AIDS) by providing a point of entry into the body. Herpes may also increase the risk of getting other STDs as well.

## What About Pregnancy?

A mother who has active genital herpes when she delivers can pass the infection to her baby during birth. This is most likely to occur when the mother is newly infected. Although this is rare, **herpes can be very serious, even fatal, for the baby.**

If you or your sexual partner have genital herpes, discuss it with your doctor or health care provider during your first prenatal care visit. This is important even if you've never had symptoms or haven't had an outbreak in a long time. Together you and your provider will discuss the best way to protect your baby.

## What About My Personal Life?

Many people newly diagnosed with genital herpes are worried about how it will impact their personal relationships. Most people find living with genital herpes is less traumatic than they expected.

Receiving proper counseling, learning about new treatments and taking preventive measures are a few steps that can help you learn to manage herpes effectively.

## Where Can I Learn More About Herpes?

The **American Social Health Association (ASHA)** sponsors a program that assists people with herpes — the Herpes Resource Center. To contact them, call 1-877-411-HERPES (toll-free), or visit the ASHA web site at [www.ashastd.org](http://www.ashastd.org).

For HIV/STD testing locations in Texas, call:  
2-1-1

For other HIV/STD questions, call:  
1 (800) CDC-INFO (English/Español)  
1 (888) 232-6348 (TTY)

For more information, go to:  
[www.dshs.state.tx.us/hivstd](http://www.dshs.state.tx.us/hivstd)



Texas Department of State Health Services  
1100 W. 49th St.  
Austin, Texas 78756-3199  
Stock No. 6-70/Revised 4/2007

Reproduction of this pamphlet is encouraged; however, copies may not be sold and the Texas Department of State Health Services should be cited as the source for this information.

# What you should know about Genital Herpes



*Texas Department of State Health Services*

## What is Herpes?

Herpes is an infection caused by the herpes simplex virus (HSV). HSV can cause sores around the mouth (“oral herpes”) and the genitals (“genital herpes”).

HSV-1 is the usual cause of oral herpes, and HSV-2 is the usual cause of genital herpes. But either type of HSV can infect any area of the body.

## How Common is Herpes?

Herpes is very common. Almost 9 out of every 10 Americans have the most common form of herpes (HSV-1). It usually appears as cold sores or fever blisters and is most often spread without sexual contact. About one in four American adults has genital herpes caused by HSV-1 or HSV-2.

## How is Herpes Spread?

Herpes is spread by direct, skin-to-skin contact. Genital herpes is almost always spread through sexual contact. Herpes is easily spread in and around the vagina, penis and anus. Herpes may also be spread between the mouth and the genitals during oral sex.

People with herpes are most likely to transmit the virus when sores are present, but **herpes can also be spread when sores are not present**. People often transmit herpes without even knowing they have it.

## What Are the Symptoms?

The first symptoms of genital herpes often appear within two weeks after being infected. However, this can vary widely. Symptoms may include:

- Sores, bumps, blisters or a rash in the genital area
- Pain or itching around the genitals, buttocks or legs
- Itching or burning during urination
- Swollen lymph nodes in the groin
- Fever, headache, or fatigue

This first “outbreak” of herpes will usually last 2-4 weeks, but this may vary. Some people have very painful symptoms during their first outbreak, while others may not notice symptoms at all.

Many people have recurrent herpes outbreaks from time to time. The symptoms of recurrent outbreaks are usually milder than those of the first outbreak and tend to occur in the same location as the first outbreak. Recurrent outbreaks are hard to predict. However, they may be related to stress, diet, illness, menstruation and sunburn.

## How Do I Know I Have Genital Herpes?

If you think you have herpes, **see a doctor or health care provider, preferably while symptoms are still present**. During the exam, a sample may be taken from the sore(s) and tested to see if HSV is present. This test works best when done within **48 hours** of the onset of symptoms. The test will not work if the sores have healed. Other symptoms, such as a yeast infection, may obscure the test result.

There is a blood test that detects HSV antibodies (the body’s response to the infection), but this test cannot be used to diagnose an active case of herpes and will not determine when you are contagious.

## How is Herpes Treated?

There is currently no cure for herpes. However, there are medications that make herpes outbreaks less painful and reduce the number of recurrent outbreaks. Ask your doctor or health care provider about these medications.

To aid the healing process, keep active genital herpes sores clean and dry. Applying ice packs may help. Taking 3-4 short baths a day in warm water with Epsom salts may also help. Do not touch other body parts with the soiled towel or washcloth used on the infected area.

Because people with herpes may also transmit the virus to other parts of their own body during an outbreak, good personal hygiene is essential. Always wash your hands after using the bathroom or touching a herpes sore. Be sure your hands are clean before touching any area around your eyes.

## How Can I Avoid Genital Herpes?

The only sure way to avoid genital herpes is by not having vaginal, anal or oral sexual contact. Remember, herpes is spread by direct, skin-to-skin contact.

Using latex condoms may offer some protection against genital herpes. However, condoms do not always prevent transmission of herpes because the virus may be in areas where a condom cannot provide protection.

## How Can I Avoid Spreading Genital Herpes to Others?

Do not have vaginal, anal or oral sexual contact when any symptoms are present — not even with a condom. Having sexual contact during an outbreak puts an uninfected partner at higher risk.

Use latex condoms every time you have sex between herpes outbreaks. While condoms do not provide 100% protection, they are the best available form of prevention for people who are sexually active. Condoms can also help prevent the transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

Talk to your partner(s) about herpes before having sex. Negotiate the methods you will use to help prevent the spread of the virus. The timing and words used to talk with partners will vary with each relationship.