

Genital herpes is a chronic, life-long, sexually transmitted disease caused by two herpes simplex viruses (HSV-1 and HSV-2).

Genital Herpes

- ▶ HSV-2 causes most genital herpes.
- ▶ HSV-1 can also cause genital herpes. More often it causes blisters of the mouth and lips (e.g., cold sores or fever blisters).

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that over 50 million persons, or about 1 out of 6 people ages 14 to 49 in the U.S. have genital herpes. It occurs in about 1 in 8 men. Many people with herpes have no signs of infection and do not know they have it. They can still pass it to others.

Herpes is more easily spread from men to women than from women to men.

How is it spread?

The herpes virus is spread by skin-to-skin contact with a person who has it:

- ▶ Most often, from herpes sores or blisters.
- ▶ Less often, from normal looking skin where the virus first entered the body.
- ▶ During vaginal, anal, or oral sexual contact, or skin-to-skin contact. This may happen even without visible sores.
- ▶ The herpes virus gets into the body from:
 - The lining of the mouth.
 - Regular skin that has small cracks or cuts.

Those who don't know they have herpes can still spread the virus to others.

Those with a weak immune system can get herpes infection more easily. A weak immune system is caused by some diseases (e.g., cancer, HIV/AIDS) and by some medicines used to treat serious diseases.

See your health care provider (HCP) to be tested if you have signs of herpes.

What are signs of genital herpes in men?

Men who have the herpes virus may have no outbreaks or signs of infection. Many do not know they have the virus. Once you are infected, the virus stays in your nerve cells for life. When the virus is not active, there is no sign of infection. When the virus becomes active, a herpes outbreak occurs. Some men may:

- ▶ Not have any outbreaks.
- ▶ Have only one outbreak.
- ▶ Have multiple outbreaks.

First Outbreak

The first herpes outbreak often occurs within two weeks after sexual contact with an infected person. Sometimes the first outbreak will not occur until months or years after the first infection. The first signs may include:

- ▶ Itching, tingling, or burning feeling in the genital area.
- ▶ Flu-like symptoms, including fever.
- ▶ Swollen glands.
- ▶ Pain or tingling in the legs, buttocks, or anal area.
- ▶ Headache.
- ▶ A feeling of pressure in the area below the stomach.

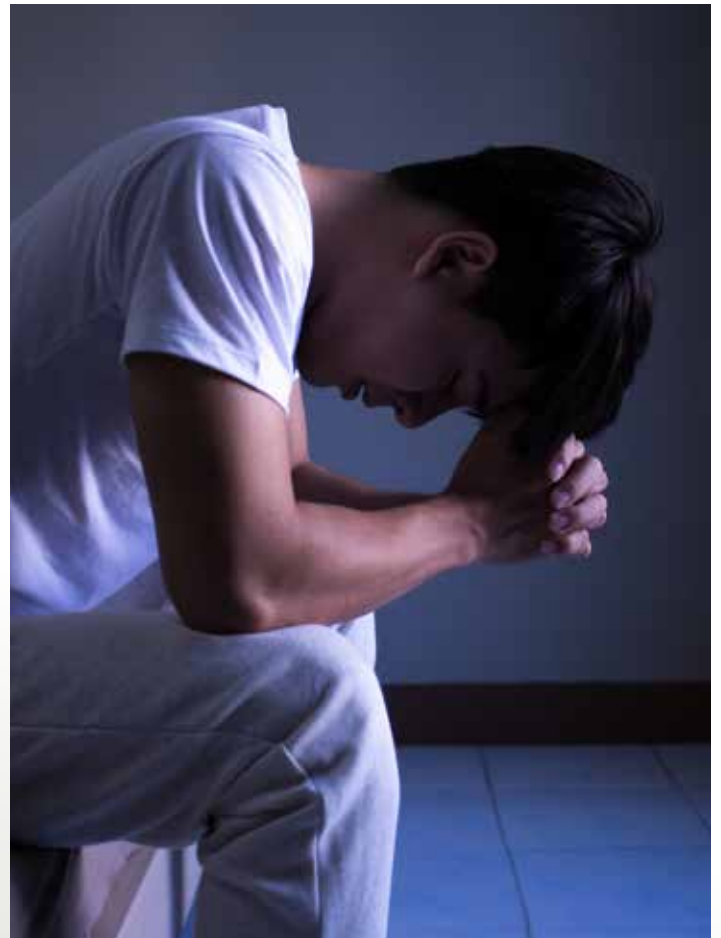
After a few days, painful sores, blisters, or ulcers may appear where the virus entered the body. These areas include:

- ▶ Genital or anal area.
- ▶ The mouth.
- ▶ In the urinary tract.
- ▶ On the buttocks or thighs.
- ▶ On other parts of your body where the virus has entered.

Other Outbreaks

After the first outbreak, you may have more outbreaks. For most, these occur less often over time. The signs of herpes infection are mostly milder than during the first outbreak, and they go away faster.

For those with a weak immune system, outbreaks can be severe and long-lasting.



How do you know if you have genital herpes?

The only way to know if you have genital herpes is by a medical exam. Your HCP can examine you and test for it. Lab samples are taken from a sore, blister, or blood. Your HCP may ask to test you for other infections at the same time.

Tell past and current sex partners of your herpes infection.

How is it treated?

Genital herpes can be treated, but it cannot be cured. Antiviral drugs may be used during an outbreak to help to make it:

- ▶ Shorter.
- ▶ Less severe.
- ▶ Less frequent.

Antivirals can also be taken daily to reduce outbreaks.

Living with genital herpes causes some to:

- ▶ Feel embarrassed or ashamed.
- ▶ Worry about infecting a sexual partner.
- ▶ Worry that having herpes will affect relationships with sexual partners.
- ▶ Avoid dating or sexual relationships.

Most people with herpes are able to live with the virus and manage outbreaks. Talking to trusted HCPs and friends can help. Discuss treatment options with your HCP. Also talk about ways to reduce passing the virus to others.

Drugs can help lower the chance that you will pass the virus to others.

During outbreaks of genital herpes, you should:

- ▶ Keep the infected area clean and dry.
- ▶ Avoid touching the sores or blisters.
- ▶ Clean hands after contact with the infected area.
- ▶ Avoid skin-to-skin contact from the time you first notice signs of herpes until the sores have healed.
- ▶ Avoid sexual activity.

How can you avoid genital herpes?

Most men get genital herpes from sexual contact with a person who has herpes. You can get the virus without having sex. To avoid it:

- ▶ Do not have vaginal, oral, or anal sex.
- ▶ Avoid skin-to-skin and sexual contact.
- ▶ If you do have sex, practice safe sex:
 - Reduce the number of sexual partners.
 - Use condoms correctly. Condoms can reduce the risk of getting genital herpes. But, condoms may not cover all infected areas. Each time you have sex use a condom (male or female type):
 - During vaginal sex.
 - During anal sex.
 - During oral sex.
 - Have sex with only one partner who does not have sex with others and does not have herpes.



For more information, see *Safer Sex* on page 71



Learn more:

Veterans Health Library:

Herpes

http://www.veteranshealthlibrary.org/Encyclopedia/142,85089_VA

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA):

Herpes simplex virus

www.hiv.va.gov/patient/diagnosis/OI-herpes-simplex.asp

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

Genital Herpes - CDC Fact Sheet

www.cdc.gov/std/Herpes/STDFact-Herpes.htm

Sexually Transmitted Diseases Treatment Guidelines, 2015

<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/pdf/rr/rr6403.pdf>

National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID/NIH):

Genital Herpes

www.niaid.nih.gov/topics/genitalherpes/pages/default.aspx

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Office on Women's Health:

Genital herpes fact sheet

<https://www.womenshealth.gov/publications/our-publications/fact-sheet/genital-herpes.html>