

Herpes

What is it?

Herpes is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by the herpes simplex virus (HSV). There are two types, HSV1 and HSV2.

Herpes can show up on the lips and mouth areas. It can also show up on the genital or bottom area. You can be infected by HSV1 and HSV2. When herpes is on the lips and mouth it is called cold sores, when it is in the genital area it is called genital herpes and when it is in the bottom area it is called anal herpes.

How do I know I have it?

Symptoms can appear days, weeks or months after you get it. They can begin with smaller warning signs like tingling, itching or pain in the infected area. You might find blisters that break and become painful sores. The sores heal by themselves but may cause itching. The outbreak lasts for about 1 week from the first symptoms to the time the sores heal.

The first time you have a herpes outbreak is usually the longest and the most painful. Some people only have symptoms once. Others have symptoms that keep on coming back, but symptoms usually get better over time. Medication helps with symptoms.

Many people with herpes have no signs and do not know that they have it.

How did I get it?

Herpes is transmitted through skin-to-skin contact during vaginal, anal or oral sex. It can also be spread during foreplay, non-penetrative sex and kissing. Herpes can be passed even when there are no signs or symptoms.

If a pregnant and a genital herpes outbreak occurs the virus may be passed onto the baby. Passing on herpes during birth is uncommon, but if it happens it can cause problems for babies. It is more likely to happen if you have your first herpes outbreak in the later stages of pregnancy. You should tell your obstetrician or midwife if you have or have had herpes.

If the first episode of herpes happens during pregnancy it can also cause complications. If you think you or your partner(s) may have got herpes while you are pregnant speak to a doctor or nurse straight away.

How can I make sure I don't get it?

Avoid skin contact for a week from the first sign of symptoms, such as tingling, on the mouth, genitals or bottom. Avoid sex if you can, if not use condoms, latex dams and water based lube to reduce the risk of spreading herpes. Taking antiviral medication can also the risk of spreading herpes.

How can the nurse/ Doctor tell me if I have it?

If there are symptoms, a doctor can test for herpes by using a long cotton bud to swab the blister, or make diagnosis by physical examination. A blood test may also be taken if there are no visible signs of infection.

How can I get rid of it?

There is no cure for herpes, antiviral medications may help to reduce the symptoms and transmission. Start treating the symptoms as soon as they appear. For more information on treatment options talk to your doctor.

Managing herpes symptoms is important. Keep the area dry, wear loose clothing and rest to allow the sores to heal.

Who do I need to tell and why?

It is a good idea to talk with your current partner about herpes to work out how best to prevent transmission. Ask your doctor if you need any help with this.

This fact sheet is just some general information. If you are worried about your health go and see a doctor.

For more information or support visit:

For more information on STIs and safe sex visit the Play Safe website:

www.playsafe.health.nsw.gov.au

Sexual Health Info Link is a service that you can call up for information on STIs and sexual health. It's anonymous and non-judgemental. Call: 1800 451 624 or visit <https://www.shil.nsw.gov.au/>

"Let them know" allows you to send an anonymous messages to tell someone you've had sex with that they have come into contact with the infection: <http://www.letthemknow.org.au/>