



Herpes is common

Herpes is a very common virus in humans, up to 1 in every 3 people probably have one herpes virus or the other.

It is not shameful to have Herpes

Anyone who is sexually active is at risk of catching genital herpes, regardless of their gender, race or social class. It is not about being good or bad or dirty, it is about being normal and sexually active.

Herpes is not only genital

HSV-1 typically affects the mouth area causing cold sores. This can be transmitted to the genitals (causing genital herpes) through oral to genital sex. Up to 40% of genital herpes is caused by HSV-1. The face is not affected by HSV-2. It can affect the pubic area, buttocks, back of thigh or inner thigh. Herpes can also occur on other parts of the body, although this is less common. On the fingers it is known as herpes whitlow.

Herpes is not always infectious

Herpes can shed from the skin on some occasions, but most of the time if you have no symptoms you are not infectious.

“Up to 80% of people with Herpes are not aware they have it as they have mild or no symptoms”

How do you get Herpes?

You get a Herpes infection by having sexual contact (vaginal, anal or oral) with a person who has a Herpes infection. Herpes is not hereditary, and is not transmitted through sperm or ova.

HSV in children is very rare. You cannot pass it to your children through normal daily activities. Hugging, kissing, bathing, sharing food and drinks are all safe. You need not reduce your physical love to your child in any way.

Are there complications?

Genital herpes is essentially a minor, sometimes recurring, skin infection; ‘cold sores’ which occur on the genitals rather than the face. It does not cause long-term ill health or affect fertility. People who get genital herpes can and do lead perfectly normal lives.

Herpes can be transmitted from mother to baby during birth. **Neonatal herpes** (babies up to 28 days old, infected by herpes) is a very rare but life-threatening disease. Neonatal herpes can cause eye or throat infections in the baby, damage to the central nervous system, mental retardation, or death. Medication may help prevent or reduce lasting damage if it is given early. If you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy it is important to know about Herpes and to be screened and tested.

What are the symptoms?

An initial infection can last more than 20 days and it’s not uncommon for someone to experience a range of generalised symptoms, such as fever, aches and pains, as well as specific genital symptoms.

Symptoms can start with tingling, itching, burning or pain. This is followed by the appearance of painful red spots which, within a day or two, evolve through a phase of clear fluid-filled blisters which rapidly turn whitish-yellow. The blisters burst, leaving painful ulcers which dry, scab over and heal in approximately 10 days. On the other hand, the blister stage may be missed completely and ulcers may appear like cuts or cracks in the skin.

In women, the genital areas most affected are the vulva and the entrance to the vagina. Sores can sometimes develop on the cervix. Some women may also experience vaginal discharge.

Women frequently experience painful urination, and when this happens, it’s important to avoid the problem of urinary retention by drinking plenty of fluids to dilute the urine and thereby reduce pain and stinging

In men, sores are most common on the glans (end of the penis), the foreskin and shaft of the penis. Sometimes, sores can develop on the testicles. Less commonly, both men and women can experience sores on the anus, buttocks and tops of the thighs.

Both women and men can experience generalised fever, aches and pains, and a depressed run-down feeling.