

# Genital Herpes

## What is genital herpes?

Herpes is an infection caused by the herpes simplex virus (HSV). One type of HSV causes cold sores. Another type of HSV affects the genital area (genital herpes). Both types are very common.

## What are the symptoms?

The first thing you may notice is some tingling in the genital area. Then you could develop small painful blisters. These blisters will break and form ulcers; these will slowly dry up and heal over 5-10 days.

The first time they get the sores, some people may also feel quite sick with headaches, backache and swollen glands in the groin.

## What other problems can it cause?

Like cold sores, genital herpes can come back again and again. It affects everyone differently. In some people it may come back quite often and be very uncomfortable, in others it may never come back or only very seldom and may be very mild or even not noticed.

Women with a history of genital herpes who are pregnant should tell their doctor. If herpes sores are present around the time of delivery usually a caesarean section will be offered to try to prevent the baby being infected. Neonatal herpes (herpes affecting the baby) is a very rare, but very serious condition.

Having herpes sores can make it easier for a person to become infected with HIV or to pass HIV on to someone else.

## How do you get genital herpes?

The virus is transmitted by skin to skin contact – such as during sex. Because there is more virus around when people have sores, herpes is most likely to be spread then, but people with normal looking skin can still pass herpes on.

People can be infected with herpes, but not know it. They may not recognise any symptoms, but are still able to pass it on to their sex partners.

Using a condom is an important way of preventing infection. But because sores may not be covered by the condom, it may not give 100% protection.

## What tests do you do?

A swab can be taken from a sore to look for the virus.

## What is the treatment?

There are antiviral tablets that will decrease the severity and length of symptoms, provided they are taken early enough after the sores appear.

If people are troubled by frequent episodes, they can take medication every day to try and prevent the sores coming back. Unfortunately, there is no cure for herpes, treatment is aimed at relieving symptoms and improving quality of life.

## For more information contact Clinic 34 in your area.

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Further fact sheets available at <http://www.nt.gov.au/health/cdc/cdc.shtml>

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