



# Herpes

## FACT SHEET

### Herpes...

- ...is transmitted by genital, anal, oral, or hand contact with sores or just before the sore is present.
- ...is caused by herpes simplex virus (HSV). HSV can cause oral or genital herpes.
- ...is not curable.
- ...can be treated with medicine. Symptoms often return from time to time.
- ...is often not visible, but is still transmittable.



### What is it?

- Herpes is caused by herpes simplex virus (HSV).
- Herpes infection causes small, painful blisters on the genitals, mouth, or anus.
- Oral herpes, called cold sores and fever blisters, can be transmitted to the genitals, and genital herpes can be transmitted to the mouth.

### How is it transmitted?

- Herpes is transmitted by having vaginal, oral, or anal sex with an infected person.
- HSV is spread by genital, anal, oral, or hand contact with the area where the sore is going to appear and with the sore itself until it is completely healed.
- An infected mother can give HSV to her baby during birth.

### What are symptoms of infection?

- Herpes may cause flu-like feelings, such as fever, swollen glands, feeling tired, and aching muscles, especially when a person is first infected.
- Herpes causes small, painful blisters on the genitals or mouth.
- Herpes blisters weep (secrete fluid), and then form scabs and heal.
- There are often no symptoms.
- The area where the sore will develop might itch and burn just before the blisters appear.
- Herpes blisters last one to three weeks, and then disappear.
- A person still has HSV after the blisters disappear. The blisters may return repeatedly.

### What are other consequences of infection?

- Herpes blisters are painful and unsightly.
- An infected mother can give HSV to her baby during birth. Infected babies may suffer severe central nervous system damage and/or painful blisters anywhere on the body. If treated, the symptoms may be less severe.
- One type of herpes can be transmitted to the eyes by hand contact. Pain and redness of the eye and pain and cloudiness of the cornea result.

### How is it diagnosed?

- Local health departments, school-based health clinics, and other doctor's offices may offer confidential, free or low-cost testing and treatment for herpes for young people.
- The only way for a person to be sure if he or she has herpes is to visit a doctor or nurse and ask to be tested for herpes. They will do a pelvic exam for women and a visual examination of the genitalia for men. Cells taken from a blister with a cotton swab will be tested. If sores are not present, a blood test may be used.

### Is there a treatment? A cure?

- Herpes cannot be cured.
- Herpes sores can be treated by a physician. Treatment usually works best if begun early.
- Treatments may reduce the symptoms and prevent more outbreaks.

### How can it be avoided?

- Abstain from vaginal, oral, and anal sex.
- Avoid genital, anal, oral, or hand contact with the area where the sore is going to appear and with the sore itself until it is completely healed.
- Reduce the risk of getting herpes by avoiding contact if blisters are present. However, blisters are not always visible.