

Herpes

What is herpes?

- Herpes is an infection caused by a virus called Herpes Simplex Virus (HSV).
- There are two types of herpes viruses (HSV-1 and HSV-2). HSV-1 commonly causes cold sores on the lips and mouth. Most genital herpes cases are caused by HSV-2.

How is herpes spread?

- Herpes is spread by direct skin-to-skin contact with the open sores or blisters. This type of contact may occur with kissing or oral, vaginal or anal sex.
- Genital herpes can be spread more easily during an active infection (from the time there are early signs of infection until the sores are completely healed).
- More commonly, transmission occurs when there are no symptoms (this is called asymptomatic shedding).
- Herpes may also be spread from a mother to her baby during childbirth.

What are the signs and symptoms of herpes?

- Many people with herpes have mild or no symptoms.
- Symptoms may appear about 6 days (between 2-21 days) after infection.
- When symptoms do occur, they are small, painful, fluid-filled blisters appearing in the genital area. Tingling or burning in the affected area may also be noticed before the blisters or sores appear.
- A group of blisters is called an “outbreak”.
- Blisters open and form a sore that will crust or scab.
- In men, these blisters may occur on the penis, scrotum or anus. In women, these blisters or sores may occur on the vulva, in the vagina, and on the cervix or anus.

- Some people do not know they have herpes because the sores may be on the cervix or inside the penis or vagina where they cannot be seen.
- Repeat outbreaks may occur but tend to be shorter and less painful than the first outbreak.
- Outbreaks can be triggered by things such as stress, fatigue, other infections, physical injury to the genital area, or conditions that weaken the immune system.
- Flu-like illness with headache, fever and swollen glands occurs over half the time with the first outbreak (primary infection).

How is herpes diagnosed?

- A swab can be taken from a blister or sore and is sent to a laboratory for diagnosis.

How is herpes treated?

- There is no cure for herpes. Once you have it you are infected for life and can spread it to others.
- Medications can shorten an outbreak of herpes and can make the sores less painful. Even without treatment, the sores will heal.
- Medications can be given by your doctor to be taken daily to prevent outbreaks in persons who suffer frequent or painful outbreaks.

What can help reduce discomfort during a herpes outbreak?

- Wear loose clothing and cotton underwear.
- Keep the area clean and dry to help the sores heal faster.
- Take a warm bath.
- Pat the area dry or use a blow-drier on the cool setting on the area.
- If it hurts to urinate, pour water over your genitals while urinating or urinate in the bathtub.
- The use of creams or lotions on genital herpes is not recommended.

How to prevent the spread of herpes?

- Avoid sexual contact if you or your partner have symptoms or are being treated for a sexually transmitted infection (STI).
- Avoid oral sex or kissing with a person who has had a cold sore recently.
- Use a condom during sex or a dental dam during oral sex. This will help to protect you and your partner against herpes and other STIs. Condoms and dental dams do not always prevent the spread of herpes because they may not cover the skin where the blisters are found.
- Herpes may be spread from the genitals to other areas of the body – wash your hands carefully after touching a sore.
- Limit the number of sexual partners you have.

How do you talk to your partner about the spread of herpes?

- When a person is infected with herpes, it is important to get the facts.
- Tell your partner about herpes and talk about ways you can prevent spreading herpes.

What are the complications of herpes?

- Herpes can put individuals more at risk to infection with HIV and can make HIV-infected people more contagious.
- Pregnant women with a history of herpes infection should discuss risks of vaginal delivery with their physician.

For more information contact:

**Your family doctor,
local public health office,
HealthLine at 811
OR the following
Sexual Health Clinics:**

Sexual Health Clinic

100 – 310 Idylwyld Drive North
SASKATOON SK S7L 0Z2

Speak with a nurse at 306-655-4642

Visit the website for clinic details:

http://www.saskatoonhealthregion.ca/your_health/ps_public_health_sexual_health.htm

Sexually Transmitted Disease Clinic

2110 Hamilton Street
REGINA SK S4P 2E3

Phone: 306-766-7788

Sexual Health Clinic

2nd Floor, MacIntosh Mall
800 Central Avenue
PRINCE ALBERT SK S6V 6G1

Phone: 306-765-6540

Battlefords Sexual Health Clinic

Rm. 104, 1192 – 101 Street
NORTH BATTLEFORD SK S9A 0Z6

Phone: 306-937-6846

(Reference: Herpes, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, National Institutes of Health (2009); Public Health Agency of Canada (2008); Sexually Transmitted Diseases, Centers for Disease Control (2010); www.sexualityandu.ca)