

## What is Genital Herpes?

- Genital Herpes is a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by the herpes simplex virus (HSV).
- It is very common. One in five people are infected with HSV.
- There are two types of the virus and both can cause Genital Herpes although:
  - HSV-1 is the usual cause of cold sores.
  - HSV-2 is the usual cause of infection in the genital or anal area.
- Once a person is infected with HSV the virus may remain in a person's body and may flare up again.

## How is Genital Herpes spread?

Genital Herpes may be passed on:

- by having skin contact, vaginal, anal or oral sex with someone who is infected with HSV
- from mother to baby during birth if a mother has symptoms at the time.

## What are the signs and symptoms?

- HSV can cause painful blisters full of fluid on or near the genitals or anus surrounded by red painful skin.
- The number of blisters can vary from one or two up to several dozen when a person is first infected.

- The blisters burst to leave sores that eventually heal.
- As they heal, the sores may be itchy.
- Some people with HSV never develop any signs or symptoms but can pass the virus on to their partners.
- Even when no symptoms are present, a person can pass genital herpes on to their sexual partners.



Early stage of Herpes infection on penis (left) and after blisters have burst on labia (right).

## How will I know if I have Genital Herpes?

Different people are affected by Genital Herpes in different ways.

Symptoms may develop 2 to 20 days after contact with HSV or maybe not until months or years later.

The illness may cause:

- influenza-like symptoms, ie, fever, headache, muscle aches
- pain when urinating

- painful enlarged glands in the groin
- pain in the genital area.

This can last several weeks if not treated. In some people the symptoms are very mild or not even noticeable. When the symptoms return (recur) the illness is usually less severe and does not last as long.

## Why does Genital Herpes recur?

Once a person has HSV, it travels down the nerves connected to the affected area. It stays there without any symptoms until it is reactivated.

Some people have found that something triggers HSV to come back. Triggers can include being premenstrual, tired, stressed and using alcohol and other drugs excessively.

## How often does Genital Herpes recur?

- Some people can have very frequent attacks of 12 or more a year.
- Others have them once or twice a year. Some people may not get an attack for many years.
- The attacks are less severe and less frequent as time goes on.
- Some people who have HSV never develop any symptoms but can still pass the virus on.

## What happens when Genital Herpes recurs?

Before an attack people may get a variety of symptoms. These may include:

- tingling where the sores will develop
- feeling irritable
- pains in the thighs, buttocks or groin
- feeling unwell.

The blisters usually last a few hours and then burst to leave sores that heal within four to 10 days.

The blisters and sores usually occur on the genitals, thighs and buttocks.

- See your doctor early to start treatment.

## Can Genital Herpes be treated?

Yes, Genital Herpes can be treated.

Treatment needs to start as soon as possible.

For advice, testing and treatment visit your:

- Student Health Clinic or school nurse
- Sexual Health Clinic
- Family Planning Association (FPA) Centre
- doctor.

Genital Herpes can be treated by tablets called Aciclovir which:

- reduce the number of outbreaks

- speed up the healing time.

Aciclovir has few or no side effects but may cause mild nausea and headache in some people.

Keep the infected area:

- clean and dry
- bathe once a day in salty water (dry the infected area gently and thoroughly).

Aspirin, paracetamol or an anaesthetic gel/jelly may help with the pain.

Treatment will help the symptoms and help prevent outbreaks of Genital Herpes, but there is no cure.

The Herpes virus can be passed on through skin-on-skin contact with the genital area not covered or protected by the condom.

## What happens at the test for Genital Herpes?

- The doctor will talk to you, examine you and discuss treatment.
- A swab test will be taken by pressing the swab against any sores or blisters.
- The specimen will then be sent to the laboratory for testing.
- If you have Genital Herpes you should also be checked for other Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs).

## How can I protect myself from Genital Herpes?

- Using condoms every time you have sex reduces the risk of getting Genital Herpes.
- Always use a condom if you are having sex with a new or casual partner.
- Condoms also help protect you from other Sexually Transmitted Infections.
- If you or your partner have Genital Herpes and have symptoms (ie, tingling or pain in the genital area) or blisters or sores it is best not to have sex. The virus can be passed on by having close skin-on-skin contact.

## Do I tell my partner I have Genital Herpes?

- Yes, your partner may have developed symptoms and need to be tested.
- If you need help to tell your partner, speak to a doctor, nurse or sexual health counsellor or call the herpes hotline.
- Your partner may have given you Genital Herpes and not know they have the infection.

## How will Genital Herpes affect me if I am pregnant?

If you are pregnant and develop Genital Herpes for the first time it can be serious. See your doctor immediately. A great deal of virus is present at this time.

- If you develop Genital Herpes for the first time near delivery you may need a caesarean section to avoid infecting the baby.
- If you have had previous attacks of Genital Herpes, you will usually be able to have a normal vaginal delivery.
- However, if Herpes blisters or sores are present, a caesarean section may be recommended so that your baby will not come into contact with the infection.

## How can I cope with Genital Herpes?

Thousands of New Zealanders have the virus.

If you have Herpes, talk to your doctor about management options that can include:

- medication
- reducing stress
- eating well and exercising regularly
- getting better sleep
- controlling your use of alcohol, cigarettes and other drugs.

Find out what triggers your Genital Herpes.

Contact the Herpes support group.

## How can I protect myself from STIs?

- Always use a condom. A condom is a thin latex or polyurethane sheath, which fits over the penis. A female condom is made of polyurethane and is inserted into the vagina. The condom collects the semen when a man comes and prevents it from entering the other person's body. Condoms make vaginal, anal and oral sex safer because they provide a barrier to prevent infection passing from person to person.

- Always use an oral dam during oral sex. An oral dam is a thin square of latex that can be used as a protective layer between the mouth and vagina or anal areas during oral sex.
- Immunisation protects against infections such as hepatitis A and B.
- Never share drug-injecting equipment, eg, needles and syringes, spoons and filters.

Some STIs are passed from person to person by skin-on-skin contact and condoms or oral dams may not prevent this. So, it is important to be well informed about your sexual health. If you suspect you may have an STI, get it checked out.

To be sure you don't have an STI get tested at an FPA Centre, Sexual Health Service, or by your doctor.

Condoms will help to protect you and your partner(s) from STIs when you have sex.

## How do I use a condom?

Check the condom pack to make sure the expiry date has not passed.

- 1 Open the packet carefully. Finger nails, rings and teeth can tear condoms.

Make sure the penis does not touch the partner's vagina, mouth or anus before being covered by a condom.

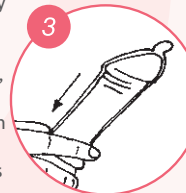
- 2 Check that the condom is the right way up. Pinch the top of the condom to remove any air.

- 3 Roll the condom on to the hard penis all the way down to the base. Use a water-based lubricant (eg, KY Jelly, Wet Stuff, Sylk and Top Gel). Oil-based lubricants such as vaseline can cause latex or rubber condoms to break.

- 4 After coming and when withdrawing hold the condom on to the base of the penis so that no semen is spilt.

Wrap the used condom in tissue or toilet paper and put it in the rubbish.

Use a new condom and lube each time you have sex!



## Where can I get condoms?

You can get condoms and oral dams from your doctor, Family Planning Centres and free from Sexual Health Services. Condoms are also available from pharmacies, supermarkets, pubs, clubs and dairies. Female condoms are available from Family Planning Centres.

## Where can I find out more about Genital Herpes and other STIs?

- Student Health Services at your university, polytechnic or school.
- The Public Health Nurse at your school.
- Sexual Health Services under 'S' in the white pages or details from [www.sexfiles.co.nz](http://www.sexfiles.co.nz).
- Family Planning Association on 0800 FPA LINE or [www.fpanz.org.nz](http://www.fpanz.org.nz).
- Your doctor in the front of the phone book under Registered Medical Practitioners.
- The Herpes Hotline (free) 0508 11 12 13. or [www.herpes.org.nz](http://www.herpes.org.nz)

## The five guides

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This resource is available from [www.healthed.govt.nz](http://www.healthed.govt.nz) or the Authorised Provider at your local DHB

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of five information guides