

Herpes Simplex

Herpes simplex virus (HSV), also known as herpes, is a common infection that can cause painful blisters or ulcers. There are two types of herpes simplex virus, type 1 (HSV-1) and type 2 (HSV-2).

Transmission

- Type 1 (HSV-1) is spread:
 - **Person to person** through saliva.
 - Oral herpes caused by HSV-1 can spread from the mouth to the genitals through oral sex. This is why some cases of genital herpes are due to HSV-1
 - Most people with oral herpes get it during childhood or young adulthood from non-sexual contact with saliva
- Type 2 (HSV-2) is spread:
 - **Person to person** by having vaginal, anal or oral sex with someone who is infected

Both HSV-1 and HSV-2 are most contagious when sores are present but can also be transmitted when no symptoms are felt or visible. Many people are not aware they have the infection and can pass along the virus to others without knowing.

Symptoms

Most people with herpes have no symptoms or only mild symptoms.

Oral herpes symptoms occur in or around the mouth or lips and may include:

- **Blisters (cold sores)**
- **Open sores**

Genital herpes symptoms occur around the genitals or anus and may include:

- **Bumps**
- **Blisters**
- **Open sores**

During a first infection, people may also experience:

- **Fever**
- **Body aches**
- **Sore throat (oral herpes)**
- **Headache**
- **Swollen lymph nodes near the infection**

People can have repeated outbreaks (“recurrences”) over time. These are usually shorter and less severe than the first outbreak.

Diagnosis

Your health care provider can usually make a diagnosis of genital herpes based on a physical exam and a history of your sexual activity. Laboratory based testing is available to see if you have an HSV-1 or HSV-2 herpes infection.

Treatment

Medications are often used to treat first or recurrent episodes of herpes. They can decrease how long symptoms last and how severe they are, but they can't cure the infection. Treatment for recurrent episodes is most effective when started within 48 hours of when symptoms begin.

Prevention

- **Avoid oral contact** with others (including oral sex)
- **Do not share objects** that touched saliva
- **Abstain from sexual activity** while experiencing symptoms
- **Practice correct use of condoms** is the best way to prevent genital herpes and other STIs
 - Condoms reduce the risk; however, HSV infection can still occur through contact with genital or anal areas not covered by the condom.

For more information about the treatment of Herpes Simplex visit [STD Facts - Genital Herpes \(cdc.gov\)](https://www.cdc.gov/std/factsheets/genital-herpes). If you have further questions about the treatment of your Herpes Simplex, contact your health care provider.

Exclusion Guidance

Individuals with herpes infections should not be excluded from work, school, or childcare unless they have mouth sores or blisters and do not have control of oral secretions or the [general exclusions apply](#). If oral secretions are uncontrolled, the child may return once mouth sores are gone.

For recurrent infections, no exclusion.

For additional information about herpes simplex, contact North Dakota Health and Human Services' Public Health Division at 800.427.2180.

Resources:

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022, January 3). Genital Herpes – CDC Basic Fact Sheet. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved June 28, 2023, from <https://www.cdc.gov/std/herpes/stdfact-herpes.htm>
2. Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research. (2022, November 22). *Genital herpes*. Mayo Clinic. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/genital-herpes/diagnosis-treatment/drc-20356167>
3. World Health Organization. (n.d.). *Herpes simplex virus*. World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/herpes-simplex-virus>