
Sexually Transmitted Diseases :

Genital Herpes (hur-pee-z)

This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a healthcare professional about any health concerns you have, and before you make any changes to your diet, lifestyle or treatment.

What is it ?

Genital herpes is a viral infection. It causes ulcers (sores) in the genital area. It is related to the virus that causes cold sores (fever blisters) around the mouth. An infected person stays infected for life. He or she may have repeated attacks of genital ulcers.

How did I get it ?

Through direct contact, usually sexual, with an infected person who has blisters or sores. Very rarely, infected people without sores may transmit the virus to others. People with sores may spread the virus to other parts of their own body with their hands. So it is important to wash and dry hands thoroughly after touching herpes sores.

What can it do to me ?

Herpes can cause blister-like sores in the genital area. With the first infection there may also be fever, joint pain, flu-like signs, pain when passing urine, itching, or tingling. The sores are sometimes very painful. They generally heal in 1 to 2 weeks without scarring. However, the virus is still there and the sores can come back. When they do come back, they are usually less painful and heal faster.

How is it treated ?

There is no medical cure at the present time. Keep the area clean and dry. This helps the

sores to heal faster. Soaking in a shallow tub of salty water may ease the discomfort. Wear cotton underwear. Synthetics hold in moisture and slow the healing process. You can spread the virus to other parts of your body (especially your eyes) with your hands. Wash your hands well after touching sores.

Your doctor may treat your first infection with pills. They can make the sores go away faster if taken early. They do not stop the sores from coming back. If you have serious disease, your doctor may prescribe pills to be taken as soon as you feel the sores recurring.

Could I give it to other people ?

Yes. Herpes is usually spread by contact with the sores. Even when you have no sores, there is a small chance you may pass the infection on to a sex partner. Many people tell a new partner they have had herpes because they have respect for the other person.

If you are pregnant, tell your doctor that you have herpes. The virus can spread to your baby, especially around the time of birth. Your doctor may need to take specific action during pregnancy and at the time of delivery.

When can I have sex again ?

When the sores are gone. You should not have sex when the sores are present because you can infect your partner(s).

Remember :

Most media stories about herpes are exaggerated. Herpes is a nuisance condition in adults, but it is life-threatening to infants.

Because the virus stays in the body, herpes sores can come back. Here are some things you can do to avoid this :

- Get enough rest and exercise;
- Try to eat good food;
- Take good care of your body and avoid stress;
- Return for check-up visits as your doctor or clinic asks;
- Tell people you have had sex with during the past 2 years. They should be examined and counselled;
- Use condoms to lower the chance of infections in the future.

If you are worried or have more questions, call your local health unit or STD clinic.

Government of Ontario

For information about health services and resources :

www.health.gov.on.ca

For consumer-friendly health tips and information :

www.HealthyOntario.com

INFOline: 1-877-234-4343;

TTY: 1-800-387-5559

Telehealth Ontario:

1-866-797-0000; TTY 1-866-797-0007

INFOline is open during business hours and can provide general information on healthcare.

Telehealth Ontario is a 24/7 service which uses nurse practitioners to answer your immediate health concerns.