



Genital Herpes

(JEN-ih-tal HUR-peeZ)

What is Genital herpes?

Genital herpes is a **S**exually **T**ransmitted **I**nfection (STI) caused by a virus. There are two types of viruses that can cause genital herpes: Herpes simplex viruses type 1 (HSV-1) or type 2 (HSV-2).

How can a person get genital herpes?

Genital herpes is spread when someone has vaginal, anal or oral sex with someone who is infected. Genital herpes can also be passed from mother to child during birth. It can be passed from sore or infected skin that does not appear to have a sore.

You can increase your risk of infection by:

- Having sex without using a latex or polyurethane condom
- Having multiple sex partners
- Having a different STI or HIV
- Having sex while high on drugs or under the influence of alcohol can increase your risk as this makes it less likely that condoms will be used correctly

You cannot get herpes from:

- Hugging
- Shaking hands
- Sharing food or using the same dish

What is the difference between HSV-1 and HSV-2?

HSV-2 is the most common type of genital herpes. This type of virus is spread during vaginal or anal sex. HSV-1 more commonly causes infections in the mouth and lips but can also cause genital herpes.

Who can get genital herpes?

Anyone who is sexually active can get genital herpes. Having unprotected sex (sex without a condom) increases the chance of getting genital herpes. In the US, about one out of every six people 14-29 years of age has evidence of HSV-2 infection.

What are the symptoms of genital herpes?

Most people do not have symptoms or have very mild symptoms that can be confused for another skin condition. If you do have symptoms or outbreaks, they usually start within two weeks after getting infected and take between 2 and 4 weeks to heal the first time they occur. Repeat outbreaks of the genital herpes virus are usually less severe and the number of outbreaks per year usually decreases from the time a person is first infected.

For those who do have symptoms, the most common ones are:

- Small sores, blisters, bumps or a rash on the vagina, penis, or rectum (bum)
- Pain and/or burning when she pees or during sex
- Tingling or scratchy feeling in your mouth and lips or between your legs.
- Flu-like symptoms

How long can an infected person spread Genital herpes?

Once a person is infected with genital herpes, they can continue to spread genital herpes to others each time they have sexual contact. It is important to know that a person can spread genital herpes to others even if they do not have symptoms. If you have genital herpes, you should talk to your provider about decreasing how often you get symptoms.

How can I find out if I have Genital herpes?

The best way to find out if you have genital herpes is by **getting tested**. A Healthcare provider may:

- Examine the area during an outbreak (when blisters or bumps are present)
- Test a sample from the open sore
- Take a blood test

Where can I get tested?

Most health care providers offer testing for Chlamydia and other STIs. To find a health care center in a neighborhood near you, call the Mayor's Health Line at **617-534-5050 and Toll-Free: 1-800-847-0710** or visit <http://www.hivtest.org/STDTesting.aspx> and enter your zip code.

Can Genital herpes be treated?

Genital herpes can be treated but not cured. Persons with genital herpes can take medication to control reoccurring outbreaks and to prevent spreading genital herpes to an uninfected partner.

How can you protect yourself from getting PID?

The only 100% effective way to prevent PID is to not have sex.

If you do have sex, you can limit your risk by taking the following steps:

- Always use a latex or polyurethane condom or barrier (dental dam) when having anal, vaginal and/or oral sex
 - Condoms made from "natural" materials may protect against pregnancy but NOT STIs
- Reduce your number of partners if you choose to have sex
- Talk with your partner about their STI status and getting tested
- Talk with your health care provider about sex safety and getting tested
- Understand that having sex while under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol can increase the likelihood of unprotected sex
- Contact your health care provider if you experience any symptoms



**For more information contact
Boston Public Health Commission
Infectious Disease Bureau
617-534-5611 or www.bphc.org**