

# Herpes - Facts

## **What is Herpes?**

Herpes is a viral infection caused by exposure to the Herpes Simplex virus. There are two strains of the virus HSV-1 and HSV-2. Type one is usually linked to blisters on the facial skin and type two with ano-genital blisters. However an increasing trend of HSV1 is seen causing ano-genital blisters/sores when transmitted through oral sex. HSV is a very common infection with as many as 7 in 10 people (70%) in the UK population having HSV1 and approximately 1 in 10 people (10%) having HSV2.

## **How is Herpes passed on?**

Herpes can be passed on through skin-to-skin contact with someone who has the herpes virus or through sharing sex toys. The virus can remain in the body and be passed on in the absence of visible blisters/sores.

Generally, a person can only get HSV-2 infection during sexual contact with someone who has a genital HSV-2 infection.

HSV-1 can cause sores in the genital area and infections of the mouth and lips, so-called “fever blisters.” HSV-1 infection of the genitals is caused by mouth to genital or genital to genital contact with a person who has HSV-1 infection.

Genital herpes is usually not passed on through objects such as cutlery or cups because the virus dies very quickly when away from your skin.

## **What are the symptoms of herpes?**

Herpes causes small, painful blisters or open sores on the ano-genital skin. If it affects the facial skin blisters appear on the lips, around the nose or inside the mouth. Symptoms usually occur four to seven days after infection. In some cases, it takes months before symptoms are seen.

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The virus stays in a nearby nerve after the outbreak has cleared. Repeat outbreaks can be triggered by lowered immunity (such as people suffering from HIV or undergoing chemotherapy for cancer), exposure to UV light (sun beds and strong sunshine), stress, being unwell, localised trauma (e.g. when having surgery to the genitals or abrasions during sex) or when drinking high amounts of alcohol.

## **How is Herpes diagnosed?**

Genital or facial herpes are usually easily diagnosed by a Doctor or Nurse upon inspection of the skin. If the diagnosis is uncertain, a swab may be taken.

## **How is Genital Herpes treated?**

If you have suffered a first episode of genital herpes, it is recommended to visit your GP or Sexual Health (Genitourinary Medicine or GUM) clinic to discuss your symptoms. If appropriate, the doctor can prescribe a five day course of antiviral tablets to suppress the virus. The medication will shorten the duration of the outbreak, but unfortunately not remove the virus from the body. If you suffer repeated outbreaks, see your GP. In severe cases, your doctor can prescribe medication, but for milder cases, simple home treatments can help to ease symptoms:

Keep the area clean with plain or salt water. This will help prevent infection and encourage healing.

A wrapped ice pack can be placed gently on sores to help soothe pain and speed up the healing process. Do not apply ice directly to the skin.

Apply petroleum jelly or a topical anaesthetic cream to any blisters or ulcers to reduce the pain when you pass urine.

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Drink plenty of fluids to dilute your urine. This will make passing urine less painful.

Avoid wearing tight clothing.

It is important to avoid any sexual activity (including oral, vaginal and anal sex) with your partner until both of you are blister free. It is also best to avoid sharing towels to limit spread of the virus.

## **Do I have to tell my partner?**

It is advisable for your sexual partners to have a check-up with their doctor and get treatment if necessary.

**If you would like to book a Herpes test or consultation simply call our dedicated client services team on 0333 920 1607 or email [sexualhealth@nuffieldhealth.com](mailto:sexualhealth@nuffieldhealth.com)**