



LENAWEE COUNTY
HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Herpes Simplex Virus

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What is Herpes?

Genital herpes is a common sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by two types of viruses. The viruses are called herpes simplex type 1 (HSV-1) and herpes simplex type 2 (HSV-2). Most people with the virus do not have symptoms. It is important to know that even without signs of the virus; it can still spread to sexual partners. Someone who has herpes might never show symptoms or outbreaks, but they can still spread it to someone who will experience herpes symptoms and/or outbreaks. Having a sore increase, the risk of transmitting herpes to someone. The Lenawee County Health Department does not diagnose herpes infections.

How is Herpes Spread?

You can get herpes by having vaginal, anal, or oral sex with someone who has the virus. Fluids found in a herpes sore carry the virus, and contact with those fluids can cause infection. You can get herpes from an infected sex partner who does not have a visible sore or who may not know they are infected because the virus can be released through the skin and spread to a sex partner. Therefore, herpes can be spread by skin-to-skin contact. Furthermore, herpes can occur in male and female genital regions areas that are not covered by a condom, so condoms may not fully protect you from getting herpes.

Symptoms of Herpes

Most people who have herpes do not have any symptoms, or have very mild ones. When experiencing symptoms:

- Genital herpes sores usually appear as one or more blisters on or around the genitals, rectum, or mouth.
- The first time someone has an outbreak they may also have flu-like symptoms such as fever, body aches, or swollen glands.
- Repeat outbreaks of genital herpes are common, especially during the first year after infection. Repeat outbreaks are usually shorter and less severe than the first outbreak. Although the infection can stay in the body for the rest of your life, the number of outbreaks tends to decrease over a period of years.
- If you touch your sores or the fluids from the sores, you may transfer herpes to another part of your body, such as your eyes.

Oral vs Genital Herpes

Oral herpes refers to the herpes virus that manifests as fever blisters or cold sores on or around the lips. This is called the Herpes Simplex Virus 1 or HSV-1. Genital herpes refers to the herpes virus that manifests as blisters or sores in or around the vagina or penis, the genital areas, this is called HSV-2 or Simplex Virus 2.

Treating Herpes

There is no cure for herpes. However, there are medications that can prevent or shorten outbreaks; usually pills. One of these herpes medications can be taken daily and makes it less likely (but not impossible) that you will pass the infection on to your sex partner(s).

Pregnancy and Herpes

If you are pregnant and have genital herpes, prenatal care visits are very important. Some research suggest that a genital herpes infection may lead to miscarriage or make it more likely to deliver your baby too early. You can pass herpes to your unborn child before birth, but it more commonly passes during delivery. This can lead to a deadly infection in your baby. Tell your healthcare provider if you have ever had a genital herpes diagnosis or symptoms. Also tell them about any possible exposure to genital herpes. If you have genital herpes, you may need to take anti-herpes medicine towards the end of your pregnancy. This medicine may reduce your risk of having signs or symptoms of genital herpes when you deliver. At the time of delivery, your healthcare provider should carefully examine you for herpes sores. If you have signs or symptoms of genital herpes at delivery, a 'C-section' is likely to occur.

This FACT SHEET is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information call your health care provider or call the Lenawee County Health Department at (517) 264-5226