



Herpes Simplex

Oral & Genital

What is herpes simplex?

Herpes simplex is a virus that can cause different types of infections in different age groups. In early childhood, it commonly causes blister-like sores in the mouth and around the lips and on tissues that are in contact with the mouth, such as a sucked thumb or finger. Genital herpes is the most common manifestation of primary herpes infection in adolescents and adults. They can cause lesions of the male or female genital organs.

Who is at risk for Herpes Simplex?

Males and females of all ages are at risk.

What are the symptoms of herpes simplex?

Symptoms include fever; irritability; tender, swollen lymph nodes; and painful, small, fluid-filled blisters in the mouth and/or on the gums and lips, commonly referred to as “cold sores”. Blisters weep clear fluid and are slow to crust over. Recurrent genital herpes manifests as lesions on male or female genitals and can spread to the thighs or back.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms appear between two days and two weeks after infection. However, once infection occurs, ongoing reoccurring flares of herpes can persist for as long as a person is infected.

How is herpes simplex spread?

Herpes simplex is spread by direct contact through kissing, contact with open sores, and contact with saliva.

When and for how long is a person able to spread the disease?

During the first infection, people can spread the disease for at least a week and occasionally for several weeks after signs or symptoms appear. After that first infection, the virus may become active from time to time, producing sores. People with recurrent infections can spread the disease for three or four days after sores appear. Sometimes the disease can be spread when infected people have no signs or symptoms.

How is a person diagnosed?

Lab tests can test for the virus. If you have a sore that is not improving, consult with a health professional.

What is the treatment?

There are medications that can be prescribed for the treatment of herpes; consult with a health-care professional for the recommended treatment. There is no cure for herpes infection.

Does past infection make a person immune?

No. The infection can reappear at various times in a person's life.

Should children or others be excluded from child care, school, work or other activities if they have Herpes Simplex?

Children and others do not have to be excluded from the group setting unless they have mouth sores and blisters and do not have control of drooling or if they are unable to participate in daily activities.

What can be done to prevent the spread of herpes simplex?

To prevent herpes from spreading:

- Exercise careful and frequent handwashing
- Avoid kissing or nuzzling children when open oral sores are present
- Do not share food or drinks
- Do not touch sores
- Avoid sharing eating utensils, straws or other objects that may come into contact with a sore
- Appropriate use of condoms may reduce the risk of genital herpes transmission

Additional Information:

Additional information is available by calling the North Dakota Department of Health at 800.472.2180.

Resources:

American Academy of Pediatrics. In: Pickering LK, Baker CJ, Kimberlin DW, Long SS eds. Red Book: 2015 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases. Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2012:[432-445]

Control of Communicable Disease Manual, 20th Edition-2015, Heymann, David, MD ed.