

Genital herpes

Genital herpes is a common sexually transmitted disease, that can affect any sexually active person. One-fifth of those infected do not show any symptoms, however they still shed the virus and can therefore transmit it to their sexual partner.

What is genital herpes?

Genital herpes is sexually transmitted infection caused by two types of viruses – HSV-2 (herpes simplex virus type 2) and HSV-1 (herpes simplex virus type 1). The disease may proceed without any symptoms; however, in cases where symptoms are present, the initial infection begins with a fever, which may be accompanied by muscle and joint pain, swollen glands, and a burning sensation during urination or a clear discharge. This is followed by the appearance of characteristic blisters on the skin or mucous membranes. The initial infection may be followed by recurrent episodes of the disease, which vary in frequency and are usually milder.

How does the genital herpes spread?

you can become infected with genital herpes through oral, vaginal, or anal sex with an infected person. Infection requires direct contact of mucous membranes or skin with secretions containing the virus. Most transmissions occur through sexual partners who show no symptoms at the time of intercourse, but who are still shedding the virus.

How can I prevent a herpes infection?

infection with genital herpes is possible even when using a condom, as the sites of herpes lesions may be outside the area covered by the condom. Condoms therefore do not provide effective protection against genital herpes infection. The primary method of preventing infection is to avoid direct contact with infectious secretions.

I am pregnant. How does the genital herpes infection affect my unborn child?

If you are pregnant and have genital herpes or have been exposed to it, it is important to attend regular prenatal check-ups with your chosen gynaecologist. Toward the end of your pregnancy, if you have very frequent outbreaks, they will recommend treatment to reduce the likelihood of an outbreak during delivery and the transmission of the infection to the new-born. If the first infection occurs during pregnancy, genital herpes can cause a miscarriage or premature birth. A herpes infection can be transmitted to the unborn child, causing a life-threatening infection (neonatal herpes) or a disseminated form of the disease in the pregnant woman. A caesarean section is recommended for pregnant women with a recent outbreak of genital herpes at the time of the expected delivery.

How do I know that I have a genital herpes infection?

In the majority of infected individuals, symptoms are mild or absent. Mild symptoms often go unnoticed or are mistaken for other skin conditions, such as acne or ingrown hairs. As a result, many

people are unaware that they have herpes. Genital herpes usually presents as one or more blisters in the genital area, rectum or mouth. The blisters burst, leaving a painful skin lesion that takes several weeks to heal. The first outbreak is typically accompanied by flu-like symptoms, including fever, body aches, and swollen glands. Recurrent outbreaks of genital herpes are common, especially during the first year after infection, but they are shorter and milder than the initial infection. Although the virus remains in the body for life after infection, outbreaks become less frequent over time.

How does the doctor determine genital herpes?

In most cases, a doctor can diagnose genital herpes through clinical examination. To confirm the diagnosis, a sample may be taken from the skin lesion or mucous membrane and tested for the presence of the herpes simplex virus; for patients without symptoms, it is also advisable to test for the presence of antibodies against the herpes simplex virus in the blood.

Can a genital herpes be cured?

There is no cure for genital herpes. But in more severe cases, the replication of the virus can be suppressed with certain antiviral medications. We can also prevent frequent outbreaks by taking medication daily over the long term, which simultaneously reduces the risk of transmitting the infection to a sexual partner who has not yet been infected.

What happens if I don't get treated?

Genital herpes causes painful skin lesions, and complications involving infection of the central nervous system are also possible, presenting with neurological symptoms. In individuals with impaired immune responses, genital herpes can also lead to a very serious disseminated infection. Care should be taken when handling secretions from herpetic lesions to prevent their spread to other parts of the body. If contact does occur, wash your hands thoroughly immediately to avoid transmitting the infection. Genital herpes infection can also significantly affect sexual activity and the relationship between sexual partners.

Can I have sexual intercourse even though I have a genital herpes infection?

If you have genital herpes, you must inform your sexual partner about it. The use of a condom somewhat reduces the risk, but does not eliminate it. If skin lesions are present, the risk of transmission is higher. Even if lesions are absent, you can still infect your sexual partner.

What is the connection between genital herpes and HIV?

Genital herpes can cause skin lesions that bleed easily. As a result, the likelihood of HIV transmission from an infected person is significantly increased.