Genital Herpes

Herpes is caused by a virus called Herpes Simplex Virus (HSV). Herpes is spread through skin-to-skin contact with an infected person. There are two forms of the herpes virus:

- **HSV-1** causes sores in or around the lips, mouth, and face, also called cold sores or oral herpes.

- **HSV-2** causes genital herpes with sores on or near the genitals. Genital herpes is a sexually transmitted infection (STI). It can be passed during vaginal or anal intercourse. It is also passed during oral sex or when there is mouth to genital contact.

**Signs of Genital Herpes**

You may have some or all of these signs:

- Blisters or sores that appear in clusters. Blisters may be red, itch or be painful. They may break open and leak out fluid and then dry up.

- Fever greater than 100.5 degrees Fahrenheit or 38 degrees Celsius

- Bigger lymph nodes. These are special glands that fight off germs.

- Headache

- Sore throat

- Fluid or blood leaking from the vagina

- Trouble urinating

- Loss of appetite

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Testing and Treatment

Your doctor or health care provider will give you a physical exam and ask about your health and sexual history. Tell your doctor when your signs started. Blood tests or a sample of the fluid in a blister may be sent to the lab to check if you have herpes.

Herpes is a chronic infection. Your doctor will treat signs of infection. There is no cure for the virus. Medicines can be used to treat the pain from blisters and to shorten the time you have the blisters. Medicines may also be used to prevent new blisters from forming.

Herpes infection has been known to cause cervical cancer in women. Talk with your gynecologist if you are diagnosed with herpes.

Self Care

To reduce the discomfort and spread of genital herpes:

- Wash your hands with soap and water before and after touching blisters.
- Keep the genital areas clean and dry.
- If it is painful to urinate, soak in a tub of warm water to relieve pain or try warm cloth compresses to reduce irritation.
- Some people find relief with ice packs. Always follow your doctor’s instructions for how long to use the ice pack.
- Use mild soaps.
- Wear loose fitting clothing. Do not wear panty hose or tight fitting jeans.
- Wear cotton underwear.
- Avoid touching the eyes after touching blisters. Herpes can spread to the eyes and cause serious infection, and in rare cases, blindness.
- Avoid reoccurring blisters. Stress, lack of sleep, and other infections can increase blisters. Healthy lifestyle behaviors can reduce the number and severity of blisters.

Protecting Your Partner

Herpes can spread to a partner when no signs are present. A partner can be infected at any time. Protect your partner by:

- Using a condom during sexual intercourse. Use of a spermicide may help too.
• Avoid sexual intercourse and oral sex when blisters are present. Avoid kissing if blisters or sore are present on the mouth or lips.

• Limit sexual partners. Talk with new sexual partners about herpes infection. Look for signs of sores or blisters in a sexual partner.

• Practice safe sex behaviors. While it is easier to spread the virus when there are blisters or sores, a partner can be infected when there are no signs.

Protecting Your Baby
If you are pregnant or think you may be pregnant, talk with your doctor. Herpes can pass from a mother to her baby during pregnancy and in some cases, be life-threatening to a newborn baby. It can also be spread during vaginal delivery of the baby. A cesarean birth may be needed if there is an active infection at the time of delivery.

When to Call Your Doctor
Call your doctor if you have any of these signs:
• Fever greater than 100.5 degrees Fahrenheit or 38 degrees Celsius
• Painful blisters or swelling on the penis, vagina, anus or mouth. Tell your doctor if there is pus or fluid leaking from the blisters.
• Problems urinating
• Headache that won’t go away or gets worse
• Problems eating or swallowing from mouth sores

For Support
Contact the American Social Health Association at (919)-361-8488 or www.ashastd.org for more information, or to find a health clinic in your area.

Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: health-info@osu.edu.