



Herpes

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The herpes simplex virus is one of the most contagious viruses worldwide and is divided into two strains: herpes simplex virus types 1 and 2 (or HSV1 and HSV2). HSV1 (the virus usually associated with oral herpes) affects an estimated 50 to 80 percent of the American population, while HSV2 (the virus usually associated with genital herpes) affects 15 to 25 percent of Americans. It should also be noted that either strain can develop into either form of herpes. That is to say, the genital virus can cause sores on other areas of the body (mouth, eyes, nose) and the oral virus can cause genital sores. This can happen by self inoculation (spreading one's own virus from lesions on one part of the body to another) or by engaging in oral or rectal receptive intercourse.

Oral Herpes

Extremely contagious, HSV1 causes oral herpes and is contracted through skin-to-skin contact, very often during childhood. The virus can be transmitted through sharing cups, kissing or contact with saliva.

Once incubated in the body, the symptoms of oral herpes appear as periodic, painful blisters called cold sores in and around the mouth. Another symptom is the swelling of the gums, mouth, or lymph nodes. The sores usually dry up and scab over around 7 to 10 days after the outbreak, although topical antiviral ointments like acyclovir or penciclovir can be applied at the outset of a flare-up to help sores fade faster. There is no cure for the virus, but prescription pills or ointments can help reduce frequency of outbreaks.

If you have an oral herpes flare-up, wash your hands frequently and avoid touching the infected area. Apply ice or a warm tea bag, and as sores heal, coat the area with petroleum jelly to help moisten the cold sore and reduce the likelihood of cracking and bleeding.

Minimize skin-to-skin contact and sharing of cups, eating utensils and personal products while the virus is active and risk of transmission is highest. Avoid performing oral sex on your partner, as the oral form of the virus can develop into genital herpes. Use latex condoms while the virus is active.

Genital Herpes

Cases of HSV2, which tends to cause genital herpes, are on the rise. An STD, HSV2 is contracted through sexual contact with infected persons, or receiving oral sex from a person infected with oral herpes.

Once incubated, the most common symptom of genital herpes are painful sores that break out on the genitals, sometimes accompanied by pain or itching on the genitals, buttocks or inner thigh area. Symptoms subside about 7 to 10 days after an outbreak, when sores form scabs and heal.

Like its sister strain HSV1, there is no cure for HSV2. Regularly applying or taking prescription antiviral medical treatments like acyclovir, famciclovir and valacyclovir at the beginning of flare-ups can help sores heal faster and avoid relapses.

If you have genital herpes, avoid sexual contact while sores are present, and use latex condoms regularly. Never touch the sores and always wash hands before touching other areas of the body, especially the face.

As both strains of the herpes virus are spread through skin-to-skin and sexual contact, open communication with intimate partners is important to avoid transmission.

Adenomyosis

