



## Durham Region Health Department Facts about...



# Herpes Simplex Virus

## What is it?

Herpes simplex virus (HSV) is a common virus that people can be exposed to. There are **two** types of HSV viruses. **HSV-1** usually causes painful blisters which are commonly known as “cold sores”, however can affect the genital area as well. **HSV-2** is a virus that is typically found in the genital area and is commonly known as “genital herpes”.

HSV can cause painful blisters on the mouth, genital area, anal area, buttocks, and thighs. Symptoms appear 2 to 12 days after first contact with the virus. This is known as the primary outbreak. Once you have HSV you carry it for a lifetime. An outbreak can occur in the same area where the first symptoms of HSV were seen. There is no way to know how severe or how often an outbreak will occur.

## How is it spread?

HSV is spread through direct skin to skin contact. The virus can be there even when there are no symptoms. **HSV-1** is passed from one person to another with mouth-to-mouth contact. It can also be spread to the genital area through oral sex.

**HSV-2** is passed from one person to another with genital to genital, genital to anal and genital to oral contact. It is uncommon for HSV-2 to be found on the mouth.

## What do I look for?

A person can have HSV and not know it. Many people have symptoms but do not realize they are caused by HSV. If you have symptoms, you will most likely feel itching or tingling on your skin. You may have painful blisters that can take 2 to 3 weeks to heal.

You may experience other symptoms such as fever, joint pain, flu-like signs, painful urination, and swollen and tender lymph nodes in the groin area. New blisters may develop for up to 5 to 7 days after the first group appears.

... over

905-668-2020 or 1-800-841-2729 | [durham.ca/health](http://durham.ca/health)

If you require this information in an accessible format, contact 1-800-841-2729.



## How is it treated?

There is no cure for HSV. There are medications that can lessen the symptoms. They work best when started as soon as possible after an outbreak begins. To help symptoms of **HSV-2** (genital herpes), you can soak in a warm bath with salty water, wear cotton underwear when symptoms start, and keep sores clean and dry. It is important to wash your hands well after touching the area where the sore(s) are to prevent spread of the virus to other parts of the body.

## How can I protect myself?

The use of barrier methods such as condoms or dental dams can help to prevent contact with **HSV-2**. If you have genital herpes, it is important to talk with your partner(s) and let them know of their risks of exposure to the virus.

Blood tests are not routinely done, but in some cases such as pregnancy, it is important to know. If a pregnant woman has experienced genital herpes symptoms, but has not been diagnosed, a blood test should be done to confirm the virus. A woman can pass HSV to her baby during birth. If you are pregnant, it is important to let your health care provider know if you have **HSV-2**.

Having a positive herpes blood test confirms the herpes diagnosis but does not tell you how long you have had the virus, which partner gave you the virus, or where and when an outbreak will occur.

To help prevent outbreaks.

- Get enough rest and exercise
- Eat a well-balanced diet
- Take care of your body
- Avoid or reduce stress
- Return for check-up visits as your health care provider asks
- Use condoms with lubricant to lower the chance of exposure to genital herpes

September 26, 2022

