

HERPES

PERSONAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

What is Herpes?

Herpes is an infection caused by the herpes simplex virus. Sores can occur where the virus enters the body. A “fever blister” or “cold sore” is the most common form (Herpes I) but it may appear as blisters or sores in the genital area (Herpes II).

What are the symptoms of Herpes?

Itching, tingling or burning is the first sign of herpes infection. This is followed by blisters which break and turn into sores that crust over and heal. During a first outbreak, you may have flu like symptoms, swollen glands, burning on urination or vaginal discharge. The infection can spread to others during the entire time one has an outbreak. Once a person is infected, it is possible to spread herpes to another without having symptoms.

How is Herpes spread?

Herpes is spread by direct skin-to-skin contact with an infected person. It can be spread to other parts of the infected person’s body (eyes, genitals) or to another person through kissing, oral sex or careless hygiene.

How long after exposure to Herpes can I expect to have symptoms?

The signs of herpes appear two to twelve days after contact.

Will Herpes come back?

Yes. Periods of stress, illness, injuries, eating poorly and worry can cause herpes sores to come back.

How do you avoid spreading Herpes?

- Learn to know your own symptoms. Avoid skin to skin contact of the infected area with another person until the skin has completely healed.
- Wash hands thoroughly after touching the affected area. Be especially careful to protect your eyes.
- There should be no sexual activity when you or your partners have herpes symptoms. Condoms may not prevent herpes, but use of a latex condom with the spermicidal Nonoxynol-9 during all sexual activity may decrease the risk of herpes and other sexually transmitted diseases.
- Avoid kissing and oral sex when fever blisters are present.
- Herpes is **NOT** spread by toilet seats, telephones or whirlpools.

Complications and precautions

- Women may have a greater risk of cancer of the cervix. Have a pap test at recommended intervals.
- If the mother has herpes, a baby may be infected at birth. Tell your doctor about your infection.
- Herpes of the eye may lead to blindness. Avoid it by handwashing and not touching your eye(s).

What is the treatment?

Herpes infection cannot be cured. There is a medication called acyclovir (Zovirax) that can decrease the symptoms or can be used to decrease the number of repeat outbreaks. See your doctor for specific treatment.

What can you do during an outbreak?

- Wash hands thoroughly after touching sores.
- Don’t share towels and washcloths.
- Wear loose-fitting clothing to allow as much air circulation as possible to help dry the infected area (wear loose cotton underwear, avoid pantyhose, tight slacks and jeans, sleep in pajamas)
- Avoid sexual contact.
- Women may find it more comfortable to urinate through a paper tube. Pour water over sores to clean.

DO NOT:

- Break the blisters intentionally.
- Apply antibacterial creams or ointments without your doctor’s advice.
- Soak the area without your doctor’s advice.

DO:

- Learn as much as you can about your infection.
- Learn to control stress and diet, and get adequate rest.
- Try to resolve your feelings about herpes--get outside help if needed.
- Herpes National Hotline



DICKINSON-IRON DISTRICT HEALTH DEPARTMENT

www.didhd.org

**818 Pyle Drive
Kingsford, MI 49802
(906) 774 1868**

**601 Washington Avenue
Iron River, MI 49935
(906) 265 9913**