

# PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET



Department of Health & Human Services

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## Herpes

### 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 but it may also appear as blisters or sores in the genital area.

### What are the symptoms of Herpes?

Most people are not aware of infection with the Herpes virus. During the first outbreak you may have flu-like symptoms such as fever and swollen glands followed by blisters that break and leave sores at the site of infection. The virus can be spread to others during an outbreak. Once infected, a person can spread herpes to another person without having symptoms.

### How is Herpes spread?

Herpes is spread by direct skin-to-skin contact with infected areas. It can be spread to other parts of the infected person's body (eyes, hands, genitals) or to another person through kissing, oral sex or careless hygiene. Herpes is **NOT** spread by toilet seats, telephones or whirlpools.

- 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 partner have herpes symptoms. Condoms may prevent herpes.
- Avoid kissing and oral sex when fever blisters are present.

### How long after exposure to Herpes do symptoms begin?

The first outbreak happens within 2 weeks after contact.

### Will Herpes come back?

Infected people can have several outbreaks within a year. Over time these outbreaks usually happen less often.

### What is the treatment?

Herpes infection cannot be cured. There are medications that can decrease the symptoms and number of outbreaks. See your doctor for specific treatment.

### Are there complications?

- A baby may be infected at birth if the mother has herpes. Tell your doctor about your infection.
- Herpes of the eye may lead to blindness. Avoid it by handwashing and not touching your eye(s).
- Herpes sores increase the risk of getting other sexually transmitted diseases.

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## 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 them.

### 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.

**For more information on Herpes, call (248) 858-1406 or toll free 1 (800) 848-5533.**

#### **Metro Detroit Help**

**1 (586) 447-2699**

[www.metrodetroithelp.org](http://www.metrodetroithelp.org)

#### **National Herpes Hotline:**

**1 (919) 361-8488**

[www.ashastd.org](http://www.ashastd.org)

#### **Centers for Disease Control National STD Hotline**

**1-(800) 227-8922 or (800) 342-2437**

**En Espanol (800) 344-7432**

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