

Genital Herpes

Sometimes you can be infected but not show any signs of disease. This is the case with some **sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)**. That is why it is so important to protect yourself and your partner from sexually transmitted infections and to talk to your doctor about being tested if you are sexually active.

An article in the June 27, 2001, issue of *JAMA* reports on a study that tested the effect of condom use on reducing the transmission of **herpes simplex virus type 2** (a virus that can cause genital herpes).

WHAT IS HERPES?

Herpes is the name of a group of viruses that include

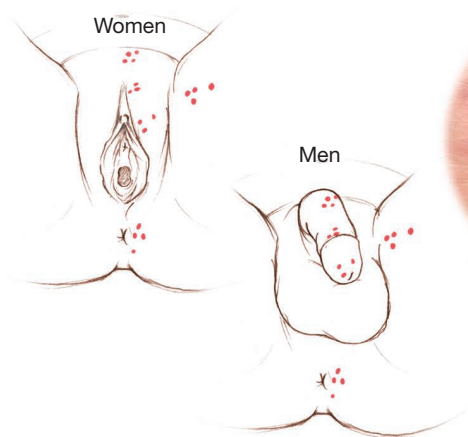
- **Herpes simplex virus type 1 (HSV-1)**—a relatively common virus that typically causes “cold sores” or “fever blisters” on the face and in the mouth
- **Herpes simplex virus type 2 (HSV-2)**—the virus that is the usual cause of genital herpes
- **Varicella-zoster virus**—the virus that causes chickenpox and **herpes zoster**, a painful nerve and skin condition also known as “shingles”

Herpes viruses remain in certain nerve cells of the body and can produce recurrent symptoms in some infected people throughout their lives.

WHAT IS GENITAL HERPES?

Genital herpes is a sexually transmitted infection that may be caused by either HSV-1 or HSV-2, but HSV-2 is the most common cause. Symptoms of genital herpes include painful blisters and ulcers in the genital region, around the anus, and on the buttocks or thighs. Many people infected with HSV-2 may not experience any symptoms and may not know that they are infected, but HSV-2 infection may be transmitted even when symptoms are absent.

Common Sites of Herpes Blisters



Appearance of Herpes Blisters



Sources: National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, The AMA Home Medical Library, The AMA Complete Guide to Women's Health, The AMA Complete Guide to Your Children's Health, The AMA Encyclopedia of Medicine

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LOWERING YOUR RISK OF SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES

Sexually transmitted diseases are spread through direct contact. To protect yourself against infection

- Practice “safe” sex every time you have sex; correctly use a new latex condom from the beginning and throughout the duration of the sex act every time you have vaginal, anal, or oral sex
- Avoid contact with body fluids (blood, semen, and vaginal fluids) and any open sores
- If you are sexually active, have regular checkups for STDs

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- CDC National STD Hotline
800/227-8922 or 800/342-2437
800/344-7432 (Spanish)
800/243-7889 (TTY)
- American Social Health Association
National Herpes Hotline
919/361-8488

INFORM YOURSELF

To find this and previous JAMA Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page Index on JAMA's Web site at www.jama.com. Previous JAMA Patient Pages were published on the following: STDs on January 3, 2001; syphilis on July 26, 2000; genital herpes on September 9, 1998; and chlamydia on August 12, 1998.

