

Herpes

We respect your right to responsible sexuality!

Facts:

- Caused by a virus called Herpes Simplex
- Are small, painful, fluid-filled blisters on the sex organs, mouth or anus – these turn into open or crusty sores and usually heal in 1 to 3 weeks.
- The sores can be painful and the skin around them may itch, burn or tingle.
- Blisters first show up 2 to 30 days after contact, although it may take far longer and some people never get them but still have the infection.
- Can be spread by skin to skin contact with the blister or the infected area.
- Can be spread when sores are not present and when there are no symptoms. This happens because the virus is “shedding,” or being released.
- Many people have herpes and don’t have symptoms and can still pass it to others.
- The blisters can come back. This is called an “outbreak.” The outbreaks of blisters usually happen less often, become less severe and less frequent over time.
- Once you have the virus, you always have it. It cannot be cured but it can be treated.

Testing:

- Visual exam and/or testing of the blisters or sores. A blood test can also be done. All of these can be done by a nurse practitioner or a doctor.

Treatment:

- Anti-viral medication can help shorten the length of the outbreak, make it less severe and decrease the number of outbreaks a person has. A doctor has to prescribe this for you.

Prevention/Protection:

- Avoid contact with the infected area during an outbreak so the infection doesn’t get passed to anyone. However, herpes can still be passed when there are no symptoms.
- A woman with herpes should notify her doctor if she becomes pregnant. Herpes can be passed from a mother to her baby during childbirth.
- Abstain from having sex with your partner(s). Discover and explore other ways to express your sexual self that don’t include vaginal, anal or oral sex.
- Only have sex with a partner who only has sex with you.
- Limit your number of sex partners - the more partners you have, the higher your risk for getting an infection.
- Condoms may not prevent the spread of herpes because the infected area may not be covered by the condom. Consider using condoms to help reduce the chances of spreading herpes. If you have several partners, using condoms with all or at least some partners reduces the chances of getting an infection.
- Alcohol and drugs lower inhibitions (take your guard down.) If you are more likely to make different decisions for yourself when you have been drinking, you may want to drink less or be sure to have condoms with you.

Kent County Health Department ♦ Personal Health Services ♦ 700 Fuller Ave NE ♦ Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503
616/632-7171 ♦ www.accesskent.com/health

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for talking with a health care provider. If you have any questions about herpes or think you may have it, call your health care provider.