Genital Herpes

What is Genital Herpes?

Genital herpes is a common sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by the herpes simplex virus (HSV). There are two types of HSV: HSV-1 typically causes oral herpes (cold sores) but can also cause genital herpes, while HSV-2 most commonly causes genital herpes.

How is Genital Herpes transmitted?

HSV is transmitted through direct contact with a herpes sore or blister, but it can also be spread when no symptoms are apparent. It's important to note that herpes can be spread from one part of the body to another, such as from the mouth to the genitals or vice versa, through sexual activities including vaginal, anal, and oral sex.

What are the symptoms of Genital Herpes?

Symptoms can vary greatly from person to person. Some people may never show symptoms, while others may experience outbreaks. If symptoms do occur, they typically appear as one or more blisters on or around the genitals, rectum or mouth which then become ulcers.

Initial symptoms may also include:

- Pain or itching around the genital area, buttocks or inner thighs
- Small red bumps or tiny white blisters
- Ulcers that form when the blisters rupture
- Scabs that cover areas where the ulcers have healed

Flu-like symptoms such as fever, body aches and swollen lymph nodes can also occur during the first outbreak.

How is Genital Herpes diagnosed?

Genital herpes can be diagnosed through a physical exam and specific laboratory tests including a PCR test or a culture of a sample from an outbreak. Blood tests can also identify an HSV infection, although they can't distinguish between HSV-1 and HSV-2.

How is Genital Herpes treated?

While there's currently no cure for genital herpes, antiviral medications can help to manage outbreaks, reduce the symptoms, and lower the risk of transmission to partners. These include acyclovir, famciclovir, and valacyclovir.

How can Genital Herpes be prevented?

The best way to prevent transmission is through abstinence or being in a long-term mutually monogamous relationship with a partner who has been tested and is known to be uninfected.

Use of latex condoms can reduce the risk of transmission, but it does not eliminate it entirely, as the virus can infect areas not covered by a condom.

If you or your partner has genital herpes, refrain from sexual activity during outbreaks and consider daily antiviral therapy to reduce the likelihood of transmission.

What should I do if I think I have Genital Herpes?

If you think you may have genital herpes, see a healthcare provider as soon as possible to discuss your symptoms and arrange appropriate testing and treatment. It's important to inform your sexual partners as well so they can be aware of the risk and seek medical advice.

Remember, it's possible to lead a normal life with genital herpes. Treatment can help manage symptoms, and support is available to help you cope with any emotional stress.

Useful Resources

- Australian Herpes Management Forum (AHMF): www.ahmf.com.au
- The Australian STI Management Guidelines: www.sti.guidelines.org.au
- The Australasian Sexual Health Alliance: www.ashm.org.au

This information is intended for general informational purposes and should not be used as a substitute for professional medical advice. If you have any health concerns, please see your healthcare provider.

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