

Genital Herpes

Genital herpes is caused by the herpes simplex virus and can result in sores or ulcers on the vulva. It can be spread by sexual contact. The outbreaks can cause pain and discomfort. The most severe symptoms often occur with the first outbreak and can include fever, flu like symptoms, swollen glands, and sores on the genital area. Many people, however, do not manifest these symptoms and therefore may not realize they have become infected. Although there is no cure for genital herpes, medications can make outbreaks go away faster or help reduce the incidence of recurrences.

Although, approximately 1 in 5 U.S. teens and adults have been infected with genital herpes, it is important to note that many people have minor symptoms or no symptoms at all. Transmission can occur from a sexual partner with no visual sore who may not know he or she is infected. Condom use can decrease the incidence of infection but because it can be spread from areas not covered by a condom, infection may still occur.

Infection with genital herpes can cause life threatening illness in newborns. It is therefore extremely important that pregnant women avoid a new herpes infection because a new infection, near the time of delivery, poses the greatest risk of infection to the baby. In women with a history of herpes infection (not a new infection) transmission to the baby is rare. Medications given toward the end of pregnancy can decrease the incidence of infection in the baby. However, if at the time of labor, any signs of active herpes infection in the mom are present, then Cesarean delivery is recommended.

The best way to avoid contracting genital herpes is to abstain from sexual contact or to be in a long term monogamous relationship with a partner who has been tested and does not have herpes.

For more information please refer to the CDC website @ <http://www.cdc.gov/std/Herpes/default.htm> or you may refer to ACOG Patient Education http://www.acog.org/publications/patient_education/bp054.cfm