

# Genital Herpes

## What You Need to Know

### What is Genital Herpes?

Genital herpes is caused by the herpes virus. This virus causes small, sometimes painful sores or blisters in or around your vagina, penis, anus or mouth. This virus can also make you feel like you have the flu. Both the sores and the flu-like feelings go away in a few weeks.

Even when the sores go away, the virus stays in your body. Some people only get the sores one time. In other people, the sores keep coming back. If the sores come back, they can be smaller, hurt less and heal more quickly.

Herpes can be frustrating and painful at times. There is no cure for genital herpes, but there are many ways to treat the sores and live with the virus.

## **How did I get it?**

Most people get genital herpes from having sex with a partner who has herpes. If your partner has sores on their lips, you can also get it from oral sex. Most people who have herpes don't know it. You can't always tell by looking at someone if they have genital herpes.

## **What should I do?**

**Follow all of your Family PACT provider's instructions.**

Your provider can show you how to take care of the sores so they can heal quickly.

## **How do I take care of myself?**

### **Don't have sex when you have sores.**

You can spread the virus from the time you start to feel the sores coming on until they are fully healed. When you have sores, it is easier for you to get HIV (the virus that causes AIDS).

### **Don't let anyone touch the sores.**

You can get more sores or give herpes to your sexual partner(s) if the sores are touched.

### **Tell your sexual partner(s).**

They should be tested for herpes and may need treatment too. Ask your Family PACT provider how you can get your partner treated.

### **Use condoms the right way every time you have sex.**

You can give herpes to your sex partner(s) even when you don't have sores or other signs of herpes.

### **Wash your hands right away if you touch the sores.**

You can spread the virus to other parts of your body, like your eyes or mouth, or to other people.

## **Take care of the sores.**

- Keep the area clean and dry. After washing, dry with a clean, soft towel or a blow dryer set on cool.
- Wear loose clothes and cotton underwear.

Your Family PACT provider may give you medicine that can help the herpes sores heal more quickly. Taking medicine every day can keep the sores from coming back. It can also help you not to spread herpes to your partners.

Your provider may ask you to come back to the clinic for a follow-up visit. They may also want to test you for other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). You can have more than one STD at the same time.

## **Protect yourself!**

- **Tell your sexual partner(s) that you have herpes.** It may not be easy to talk about, but they need to know.
- **Don't have sex when you have sores.**
- **Always use a male or female condom when you have sex.** Your Family PACT provider can give you condoms and explain how to use them.
- **Take care of yourself to help keep the sores from coming back.** Stay rested. Get enough sleep.
- **Ask your Family PACT provider about getting an HIV test.** Having herpes makes it easier for your body to get HIV. Persons with HIV and herpes are more likely to spread herpes to their partners.
- **Ask your provider where you can get vaccines** that help protect against Hepatitis B and HPV infections.

## **For Women**

**If you get pregnant, tell your doctor that you have herpes.** Herpes can be passed to your baby at birth. Protect your baby. Get prenatal care.

## **Resources**

**To learn more about herpes, call the CDC toll-free hotline at 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636).**

**For information about the Family PACT program and providers near you, call 1-800-942-1054 or visit [www.familypact.org](http://www.familypact.org).**