

Lifetime Medical Associates *

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What is herpes simplex?

Herpes simplex is caused by the herpes simplex virus (HSV). There are two types: HSV-1 and HSV-2. HSV-1 usually infects the skin around the mouth. HSV-2 usually infects the skin of the sex organs. Most HSV-1 infections are spread by casual contact during childhood; 80% of adults have been exposed to HSV-1. HSV-2 is spread by sexual contact. The most common symptom is painful blisters around the mouth or sex organs. The blisters pop, leaving behind a small ulcer, which crusts over before it heals. HSV-1 blisters, commonly called "cold sores" or "fever blisters", can involve the eye, but that is rare.

Most people who are infected never have symptoms. Blisters, if they appear, occur days or weeks after exposure to the virus. Recurrences of the blisters happen to some people months or years after a person is infected. Some people have blisters only once, whereas others get blisters over and over again. It is common to have itching, pain, burning, or tingling before the blisters form.

What are the symptoms of herpes simplex?

The most common symptom of HSV is painful blisters that form around the mouth and gums, or sex organs. Other symptoms include:

- Eye pain, especially to bright light
- Eye redness
- Fatigue
- Fever
- Headache
- Itching
- Muscle ache
- Pus from blisters
- Tearing from the eyes
- Tingling



What tests are needed?

After asking about your medical history and doing a physical exam, your doctor will probably be able to look at the blisters and tell if they are caused by HSV. Your doctor may collect some fluid from a blister to see what is causing the infection. Blood may also be tested for the presence of antibodies against HSV.

What treatment is needed?

If caught early in the infection, your doctor will give you an antiviral medicine to help the blisters go away. Some people who get blisters over and over again may need to take this medicine to prevent the blisters from coming back. Other medicine may also be given to help the pain.



Do

- Do tell your doctor if you are pregnant or plan to get pregnant
- Do wash your hands with soap and warm water often, especially after using the bathroom, to avoid spreading the infection
- Do keep the blistered skin clean and dry
- Do be honest with your sexual partner about having HSV infection
- Do call your doctor if your symptoms become worse, if you have a fever, or pus drains from a blister
- Do call your doctor right away, or go to the emergency room, if you have a severe headache, shortness of breath, eye pain, or bright lights bother you



Don't

- Don't kiss or share eating utensils or personal care items with anyone while you have symptoms because you can spread the infection
- Don't have sex until both you and your sexual partner have no symptoms and your doctor tells you it is OK to have sex
- Don't shave the effected area
- Don't touch, rub, or scratch your blisters
- Don't touch your eyes when you have symptoms
- Don't take aspirin; this can cause a serious illness called Reye's syndrome



Recovery time

- Most blisters go away in 10-14 days and heal without scarring
- Medicine helps the symptoms and speeds recovery
- Some people's blisters return and must be treated again



What can be done to stop it from happening again?

- Avoid physical and emotional stress because this can make the blisters return
- Avoid catching common colds and flu as these can make the blisters return
- Eat healthy foods and get enough sleep and exercise to strengthen your immune system
- Avoid too much alcohol; this can weaken your immune system
- Avoid spending too much time in the sun or getting sunburned because this can make the blisters return
- Avoid contact with people who have an active HSV infection
- Practice safe sex - wear a latex condom every time you have sex