

- > Genital herpes is caused by the herpes virus. Infection with this virus (herpes simplex) can cause blisters on the skin and mucous membrane (lining) of the penis, vagina, anus or mouth. You can infect others during unprotected sex. The herpes virus always remains in your body.

What will you notice if you have herpes?

Most people don't realise that they have become infected with the herpes virus.

If you do have symptoms, it is mostly within a week after infection. You may not feel well, with a fever and aches and pains. Both men and women may experience pain and a burning sensation when passing urine. Women can also have itching and vaginal discharge as well as swollen glands in the groin. Blisters filled with clear fluid will appear on the skin and mucous membrane.

- > Women will have these blisters on the vagina, skin folds around the vagina (labia), or entrance to the uterus/cervix (entrance to the uterus), in or around the anus, or in the mouth.
- > Men can have them on the outside or head of the penis (glans), and in or around the anus. The herpes infection may also be in the mouth.

The blisters are often very painful. They burst and heal within one to four weeks, leaving no scars. New blisters may appear at any time.

A period, flu, low resistance or stress increase the risk of a new outbreak of herpes. The first outbreak is usually the worst.

Risk of herpes

The herpes virus is present in the blister fluid. During unprotected sex this fluid comes into contact with the penis, vagina, anus and lips. You can also pass on the virus with your hand or fingers. So do not touch the blisters.

The greatest risk of infection is when the blisters have burst. But you can also be infected by someone who has herpes with no blisters.

- > Condoms do not give 100% protection against herpes. The virus always remains in the body. And it is even possible to infect others if you have no blisters. Treatment is only necessary if there are symptoms.

Cold sores

A cold sore on your lip also contains herpes simplex, but this is a different type of virus to genital herpes. A person with cold sores can pass on a herpes infection to the penis or vagina during oral sex.

Treatment for herpes

There are drugs that can limit the length and severity of a herpes outbreak. You will need to start treatment soon after the symptoms appear. Cold sore creams do not work against genital herpes.

Further advice

- Avoid touching blisters, cuts or scabs.
 - Wash your hands thoroughly if you have touched the infected skin.
 - Do you have more than six outbreaks of herpes a year? Consult your doctor about long term treatment.
 - It is best not to have sex during an outbreak of herpes.
 - Don't have oral sex (sucking or licking) with a cold sore.
- > Are you having the first outbreak of herpes in advanced pregnancy? Get in touch with your midwife or doctor immediately. Herpes can be very dangerous for a newborn baby. A caesarean delivery may be necessary to prevent the baby becoming infected.

Warning partners

Tell your sexual partner(s) that you have the herpes virus. He or she may have no symptoms of herpes.

- > Is it difficult for you to warn partners yourself? Then ask your local GGD health centre to do it for you. They will be discreet. partnerwaarschuwing.nl is a Dutch website you can use to warn your partners.

For more information about genital herpes, go to soaids.nl/en/herpes

AIDS STI helpline

Do you have a question about herpes that has not been answered in this leaflet?

- > **Call the AIDS STI helpline:** 0900 204 204 0 (10ct per min.)
Monday and Tuesday: 10 a.m. – 6 p.m.
Wednesday to Friday: 2.– 6 p.m.
- > **Send an email to the AIDS STI helpline:**
Sense@soaids.nl, you will receive an answer within two working days.
- > **Or visit the chat office hour on Soatest.nl**
Monday to Thursday: 1.30 – 3.30 p.m.

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