

## **GENITAL HERPES**

Genital herpes is the most common cause of genital sores. It is caused by herpes simplex virus 2 (HSV-2) and sometimes by the cold sore virus, herpes simplex virus 1 (HSV-1).

### **Symptoms**

A person with genital herpes may have no symptoms, a mild itchy area on the genitals or a severe outbreak requiring hospitalisation. Symptoms usually appear 6–12 days after the sexual contact.

Symptoms, if present, may include a flu-like illness, swollen glands followed by a tingling/itching/burning feeling in the genital region. Blisters form to become small ulcers that crust over, heal and fade after about 15 days. Once the ulcers have healed they can recur at any time. Recurrences tend not to be as severe or last as long as the initial outbreak.

### **Transmission**

Genital herpes can be passed on by genital skin-to-skin contact during sexual activity. A person may pass on herpes at any time even when symptoms are not present. The cold sore virus (HSV-1) can also be transmitted from the mouth to an uninfected person's genitals during oral sex. There is a risk of transmission to a baby during pregnancy and/or delivery, especially if genital herpes is first acquired in late pregnancy.

### **Diagnosis**

Genital herpes is best diagnosed when active symptoms are present. A swab can be taken from the blister fluid and tested for the presence of genital herpes virus.

Blood tests can be helpful in some circumstances to tell if someone has come into contact with genital herpes virus. However, blood tests are not often used to diagnose genital herpes.

### **Treatment**

There is no cure for genital herpes. However medications help manage the symptoms by shortening the time symptoms are present, or by helping to prevent or delay recurrences (outbreaks).

Symptoms can be relieved through use of salt baths. Use a couple of table spoons of salt in a bath tub of warm water. Pain relief medications such as paracetamol or aspirin can lessen discomfort.

### **How to avoid getting genital herpes**

Using condoms, dams and lubricant can reduce the possibility of transmission of genital herpes. However, because genital herpes infection can be spread via direct skin contact, barriers and safer sexual activities do not completely eliminate the risk of transmission.

### **Partners**

Most transmissions occur when people with genital herpes are asymptomatic (don't have symptoms) or are unaware that they have genital herpes.

If you are aware that you have genital herpes you should consider telling your sexual partner(s), as there is no absolute way that you can prevent the possibility of transmitting genital herpes during sexual activity.

### **Counselling and Support**

The psychological and emotional impact of genital herpes can be severe for some people. Counselling is helpful for many people with this infection.

A sexual health counsellor is available at the Sexual Health Service. The counsellor can help you understand and cope with the effects of genital herpes, including talking to sexual partners. Just call your local office to make a time to see one of our trained counsellors.

For more information about herpes or counselling please see our pamphlets on *Sexual Health Counselling and Management of Genital Herpes*.

*Sexual Health Service Tasmania is staffed Monday to Friday from 8.30 am until 5.00 pm. Clinic times vary from site to site so please contact your local office for details (see contact details on the back of this pamphlet).*

**Sexual Health Service  
Clinical Services**

**HOBART**

60 Collins Street  
Hobart 7000  
Ph: (03) 6233 3557

**LAUNCESTON**

42 Canning Street  
Launceston 7250  
Ph: (03) 6336 2216

**DEVONPORT**

23 Steele Street  
Devonport 7310  
Ph: (03) 6421 7759

**BURNIE**

11 Jones Street  
BURNIE 7320  
Ph: (03) 6434 6315

**SEXUAL HEALTH SERVICE  
A joint Australian and State  
Government Program**

*The Royal Hobart Hospital is Tasmania's largest hospital and provides a number of state-wide services including cardiothoracic surgery, neurosurgery, burns management, hyperbaric and diving medicine, neonatal intensive care and high-risk obstetrics. It is the major teaching and research hospital for the State and works closely with the University of Tasmania.*

*Many students in the health care professions are taught within the Hospital, and gaining skills in examining and interviewing patients is an important part of their education and training. We ask for your co-operation and encourage you to participate in our teaching and research activities. Your permission is required for participation.*

The Royal Hobart Hospital encourages feedback from patients, relatives and visitors. This feedback helps staff to better understand the needs of patients and provide the best possible patient care.



**The Royal Hobart Hospital  
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**Information  
Pamphlet**

Sexual  
Health  
SERVICE

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