

Herpes

Myth vs Facts

Find out more at

www.herpes.org.nz

For further information ring
Herpes Helpline **0508 11 12 13** toll free from a landline
or **09 433 6526** from a mobile

Sexually Transmitted Infections Education Foundation

Copies of this pamphlet are available from:

Email: info@stief.org.nz

www.stief.org.nz

New Zealand Herpes Foundation

www.herpes.org.nz

Helpline toll free: **0508 11 12 13**

Phone: **09 433 6526**

View our consumer website with information about sexual health
and all sexually transmitted infections, including a national
database of sexual health providers:

www.justthefacts.co.nz

Supported by an educational grant from **Te Whatu Ora - Health New Zealand**

© 2022 Sexually Transmitted Infections Education Foundation

V2, 10/22



Herpes – Myth vs Facts

Herpes is common, manageable and treatable

MYTH Only certain sorts of people get herpes.

FACT No, **it is very common and anyone who has ever had sex can get genital herpes.** It's not about being clean, dirty, good or bad – it's about being normal and sexually active.

MYTH Herpes isn't that common and I am unlikely to get it.

FACT Herpes is very common and may be caused by both herpes simplex type 1 and type 2 (HSV-1 or HSV-2). HSV-1 causes "cold sores" on the mouth, and up to 80% of the population has this virus. However, it may also be transmitted to the genitals through oral-genital sex and about 50% of genital herpes is caused by HSV-1. Up to 22% of sexually active adults have genital herpes caused by HSV-2. Most people with herpes will not have symptoms and therefore will not be aware they have it. 75% of people who acquire herpes get it from partners who are unaware they have it.

MYTH Herpes "cold sores" on the mouth are not the same as genital herpes.

FACT Cold sores on the mouth or face are caused by HSV-1 and are commonly transmitted to the genitals (causing genital herpes) through oral-to-genital sex. Up to 50% of genital herpes is caused by HSV-1.

MYTH Herpes can only affect the genital area.

FACT HSV-1 typically affects the mouth area. HSV-2 and HSV-1 affect the genitals, pubic area, buttocks, back of thigh or inner thigh. Herpes can also occur on other parts of the body, although this is less common. On the fingers it is known as herpes whitlow.

MYTH People always know if they have genital herpes.

FACT No, **80% of those with genital herpes do not know they have it,** as they may have no or very mild symptoms.

MYTH People with herpes are always infectious.

FACT A person with herpes is not always infectious but the virus is occasionally shed from the skin when symptoms are not present. Most of the time when you don't have symptoms you are not infectious.

MYTH When you have an STI check or a cervical smear, it always checks for herpes.

FACT **Routine sexual health (STI screens) checks and cervical smear tests do not screen or test for herpes.** Tests for herpes can only be done if a person has symptoms and a swab is taken directly from the lesion.

MYTH People with herpes cannot have children.

FACT **Herpes does not affect fertility in either men or women, and women with genital herpes can have normal pregnancies and vaginal delivery.** Herpes can be passed on to babies, but this is rare. If you are pregnant and you or your partner has herpes, tell your health care professional.

MYTH Herpes causes cervical cancer.

FACT **Herpes is not associated with cervical abnormalities or cervical cancer.** These are caused by HPV (human papillomavirus), which is not herpes.

MYTH Herpes is passed through blood.

FACT **Herpes is not present in the blood.** People with genital herpes can still donate blood. Genital herpes is only passed through direct skin-to-skin contact, both orally and genitally.

MYTH If you have herpes you should always wear condoms in new long-term monogamous relationships.

FACT In long-term relationships, most couples choose not to continually use condoms, and understand that getting herpes is just a part of life. (Your partner may already have herpes without being aware of it). Whilst some people may experience troublesome symptoms from time to time, for the majority, herpes is not symptomatic or causes only mild symptoms. Medication is available for those that need it.

MYTH If you have genital herpes you can't have (receive) oral sex.

FACT Herpes transmission to the mouth is uncommon.

MYTH I can pass herpes to myself from my mouth to my genitals if I accidentally touch myself.

FACT Once you have herpes at one site, it is rare to then get the same type at another site. This is because your body develops antibodies which prevent this from happening.

MYTH It's risky living in the same house as someone who has genital herpes.

FACT The herpes simplex virus (HSV) is not spread through sharing communal facilities. When the virus leaves living skin cells, it dies. People with genital or facial herpes are able to use the same showers, toilets, washing machines and swimming pools as anyone else, without the worry of passing on the infection.

Winning the war in your mind.

The emotional impact of being diagnosed with genital herpes is often much worse than the condition and it doesn't deserve the upset it causes.