It can happen to anyone:
First diagnosis of genital herpes

• The New Zealand Herpes Foundation
• www.herpes.org.nz
• Email info@herpes.org.nz
• Phone 09 433 6526
• Fax 09 360 2835
Genital herpes – a common infection that affects ‘ordinary’ people

Myths and ignorance abound......

Good information helps make sense of diagnosis
Why do I feel this way?

Common reactions

A diagnosis is often unexpected and you may feel

- Surprise, shock and grief
- Uncertainty
- Anger & blame

or just have some questions......
What is the herpes simplex virus (HSV)?

- A common viral infection that’s been around for centuries
- Most people have no symptoms
- Causes facial herpes (HSV1) passed by kissing
- and genital herpes (HSV1 or HSV2) passed by oral sex (HSV1) or genital-to-genital contact (HSV1 or HSV2)
- A fragile virus that dies when it leaves living human cells – not passed on through non-sexual contact e.g. toilets & showers, trying on clothes, medical examinations
When did I contract the virus?

Often not possible to work out because:

- Most people contract herpes from a partner who did not know they have HSV
- Most have very mild, or no symptoms and go undiagnosed – may have genital herpes for months or years before diagnosed, if ever
- Only small % of people have severe 1st symptoms – may indicate new infection
- HSV is not routinely tested for in sexual health check-ups
How do people contract genital herpes?

Through direct skin to skin sexual contact including:

- Genital to genital and oral to genital
- Therefore virgins can & do contract genital herpes
- Condoms reduce transmission (condoms do stop many STIs)
- Partner has to be infected either facially or genitally – sore may not be obvious & the virus may be on the surface of the skin without symptoms on small % of days
Who did I contract the infection from?

- May be impossible to work out how long a person has had the infection & who HSV came from
- If genital HSV1—probably transmitted through oral sex, partner may have or had ‘cold sores’ on face
- If first symptoms are mild, may have had the infection for months or years
- Significant first symptoms (‘flu-like illness, lots of blisters) may mean HSV contracted in past 2–20 days.
- If several recent partners may be impossible to determine who the infection came from
- Genital herpes may appear in a long-term relationship with no outside partners involved
What next? Recurrences and treatment options

- Recommend oral anti-viral medication and pain relief to treat first episode
- Optional oral medication for recurrences
- If unwell take time off work – rest
- Prescription needed for anti-viral medication
- HSV1 – may have few, if any recurrences
- HSV2 – may have 2–6 recurrences per year
- Recurrences usually mild and are over in a few days
- Most people don’t use regular medication after 1st episode
What next? Relationships

- Talk to your partner—share information

- Partner may have HSV—once contracted the virus doesn’t pass back and forth

- Reduce transmission by avoiding genital contact with partner when symptoms present

- Condoms reduce transmission of HSV

- If partner does contract virus, most likely to have few if any symptoms
What’s next? Future plans

People with genital herpes have normal lives...

• Have normal fertility
• Women have healthy babies and vaginal deliveries –
  • Can donate blood
  • Can work in any occupation
  • Can use spa & swimming pools
  • Can cuddle with their kids in bed, share a bath
  • Make choices with their partners about sexual practices and the use of condoms
• Have the same overall health, immune system and lifespan as others and no additional cancer risk
What next? Talking is good

• Tell trusted friend/family member
• Return to your GP, Family Planning Clinic or sexual health clinic for follow-up
• Counselling available at sexual health clinics
• For information, phone counselling & support group contact:
  • Phone toll free 0508 11 12 13 or from a mobile 094336526
  • [www.herpes.org.nz](http://www.herpes.org.nz)
NZ Herpes Foundation: Helping people to live ordinary lives

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