

# It can happen to anyone: First diagnosis of genital herpes



- The New Zealand Herpes Foundation
- [www.herpes.org.nz](http://www.herpes.org.nz)
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# 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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



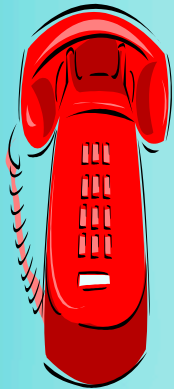
# What next? Talking is good

- 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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