

# Herpes...

## **MYTH**

VS

## **FACT**



THE NEW ZEALAND  
HERPES FOUNDATION

# Herpes – Myth vs Fact

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**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.

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**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 40% 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. 50% of people getting herpes get it from partners who are unaware they have it.

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**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 40% of genital herpes is caused by HSV-1.

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**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.

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**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.

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**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.

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**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.

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**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

## *Herpes is common, manageable and treatable*

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**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.

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**MYTH: *Herpes causes cervical cancer.***

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

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**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.

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**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.

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

**FACT:** Herpes transmission to the mouth is uncommon.

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**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.

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**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.

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### ***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.*

## Know the facts.

For further information ring  
**Herpes Helpline Tollfree 0508 11 12 13**  
or from a cellphone **09 433 6526**

For more copies of this booklet  
email [info@herpes.org.nz](mailto:info@herpes.org.nz)  
or visit [www.herpes.org.nz](http://www.herpes.org.nz)



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