

# Herpes

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Herpes is a virus that spreads during skin-to-skin contact, most often through vaginal, anal or oral sex. A person with herpes in their mouth can pass herpes to a partner's mouth when kissing, or to the genitals of a sex partner during oral sex. Herpes is very common in the United States. You can get herpes from a sex partner who has herpes even if they do not have any visible sores.

# Symptoms

Many people with herpes do not have symptoms.

When symptoms are present, they include outbreaks of painful blisters or sores that scab and heal without scars.

The blisters or sores might be hidden in the genitals, rectum (butt) or mouth.

During an initial outbreak, you may also experience swollen glands, muscle aches, headache, fever, and pain or difficulty during urination.

# Prevention

Condoms and dental dams can help prevent the spread of herpes, but only if they cover the infected area. Avoid having sex with someone who has an open herpes sore.

## **Testing**

Your health care provider may swab or scrape a blister or sore to test for herpes. Health care providers can also test blood for herpes, but this is not a standard practice.

## **Treatment**

Some medications can shorten herpes outbreaks, relieve discomfort and make transmission less likely. Daily medication is also available to reduce the frequency of outbreaks. There is no cure for herpes.

## **Sex Partners**

If you are diagnosed with herpes, talk to your current sex partners so they can be evaluated for herpes and other sexually transmitted infections

(STIs) and treated appropriately.

## **Herpes and Pregnancy**

Herpes can be passed on to your baby, particularly during delivery. Herpes causes serious infections in newborns and can result in brain damage or death. Herpes is dangerous for babies if the pregnant parent gets herpes late in pregnancy. A Caesarean section is recommended if herpes sores are present during delivery.

Tell your health care provider if either you or your partner has herpes and you are pregnant. You can take medicine to decrease the risk of having a herpes outbreak around the time of delivery.



New York City Sexual Health Clinics provide confidential, low- to no-cost services including STI and HIV testing.

To find a clinic, visit **[nyc.gov/health/clinics](https://nyc.gov/health/clinics)**.