

Dermatology Associates of Plymouth Meeting

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What is Herpes?

Herpes is an umbrella term for a group of several contagious viral infections. The most common types are known as Herpes Simplex Type 1 and Herpes Simplex Type 2. Type 1 is usually what causes fever blisters and cold sores on the face and lips. Type 2 primarily occurs on the genitals. Another common strain of the Herpes virus is the Varicella Zoster virus, which causes both Varicella (Chicken Pox) and Zoster (Shingles).

Type 1 Herpes Simplex surface on the lips and face and are fluid filled blisters that can be very tender, tingling and painful. The blisters begin healing by drying up and crusting and then pink healed skin is appears as the crusting dissipates.

Type 2 Herpes Simplex most often manifests as painful sores, with a burning sensation in the genital area which is most acute during urination. Although it is most common on the vagina and penis, it can occur on the cervix. Type 2 Herpes is most commonly spread through sexual intercourse.

What are the symptoms?

The virus can surface quickly with or without symptoms. This is because once contracted the virus never goes away. It retreats into what is called a resting phase in the skin cells and nerve endings, and an outbreak can recur quite suddenly. The most common warning signs and symptoms are tingling and/or tenderness. Sometimes symptoms may not get any worse than that. However, if an outbreak is going to occur, the next symptoms will be puffy, red and sore skin. Within a day, blisters, sores or bumps appear and last for several days. There is often a burning soreness or tingling, sometimes be accompanied by swollen glands and feverish flu-like symptoms.

How is it spread? How long does it last? Can it come back?

Herpes is spread through direct contact and the virus is broken down into two categories: primary and recurrent.

If a primary infection develops into an initial outbreak, it will usually occur within two to twenty days after exposure with an infected person. Symptoms can be as mild as tingling

and as severe as a large painful sore. Blisters and sores from the first infection take seven to ten days to heal, with the most acute phase occurring in days two through five. Once the sores heal, the virus lies dormant in the nerve cells and may not recur. However, it usually does. At times, primary infections can potentially go unnoticed-particularly if the genitalia are involved.

When people experience a recurrence, it is frequently not as intense as the primary outbreak, in terms of length or severity. Most often, it recurs in the same location as the primary infection. Stress, fatigue, colds, weakened immune system, and sun exposure can trigger a recurrent outbreak.

How is Herpes treated?

Fortunately there are outstanding oral anti-viral medications available by prescription to treat herpes. Both medicines treat primary and recurrent infections and can be used in maintenance doses to prevent recurrent attacks.

How is Herpes prevented?

With Type 1 Herpes on the lips and face, avoid kissing, sharing eating utensils, drinks and any kind of lip product, such as lipstick. When Type 2 Herpes is active all sexual relations must be avoided