Helping Hands
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HERPES SIMPLEX VIRUS (HSV)

Herpes simplex virus (HSV) is a virus that causes infections. There are two types of this virus. One type usually causes cold sores around the lips that are sometimes called fever blisters. The other type usually causes sores on the genitals (private parts). Either type can infect the mouth or genital area. Herpes can be spread even when the infected person has no sores or outward signs of infection. But it spreads most easily when infected area touches the skin of another person.

SYMPTOMS OF HERPES

Symptoms of herpes usually begin within 2 to 20 days after contact with the HSV virus. The skin becomes painful, or it may itch, burn, or tingle. Then one or more blisters appear. The blisters open and the sores (sometimes called ulcers) heal over without leaving a scar. Often flu-like symptoms such as swollen glands, body aches, and fever also develop. The outbreaks usually run a course of 10 to 14 days.

When the sores have healed and the skin looks normal again, the virus is no longer on the surface of the skin. However, the herpes virus lives in the nerve cells. It can cause sores on the skin in the future, even if you have no more contact with an infected person. The sores can come back at any time when you have a lot of stress, get too tired, or have illness, irritated skin, sunburn, or a poor diet. It can also come back during menstruation.

HOW HERPES IS TREATED

- There is no cure for herpes. However, your doctor may prescribe and antiviral medication to help speed up the healing process. It shortens the time when the virus can spread from the herpes sores.
- Supportive measures are taken to help alleviate symptoms. Ensure that adequate hydration is maintained and use acetaminophen (Tylenol) to help reduce fever, if present.
- As a general rule, avoid liquids containing citric acid such as juices and carbonated beverages. Nonirritating substances (milkshakes, chilled high-protein liquids) help maintain hydration and adequate levels of nutrition. Because they are cold, they are more comfortable to drink.
- It is important to stay healthy by getting enough rest, having proper nutrition and exercise, and managing stress well.
- Keep the infected area clean and dry.

OTHER IMPORTANT POINTS

- **Protect infants from being kissed by anyone with a cold sore. Babies can get very sick from HSV.**
- Avoid touching the sores or the skin around the infected area. If you do touch the area, wash your hands with soap and water right away. The fingers, eyes, and other parts of the body can become infected.
- Do not kiss anyone when the mouth sores are present.

If you have further questions or concerns, please feel free to contact our office at (970) 493-2254.