

Genital Herpes and Pregnancy

The herpes simplex virus causes genital herpes. There are many types of herpes viruses. Both herpes simplex type 1 (HSV1) and herpes simplex type 2 (HSV2) can infect the genital area.

Commonly the cause of 'cold sores', HSV 1 tends to occur in the upper half of the body, mainly around the lips and mouth. HSV 1 can also infect the genital area. HSV 2 is more commonly the cause of genital herpes. Both viruses are passed from one person to another by close body contact.

If you are pregnant and you get genital herpes, it is important to tell your midwife or obstetrician.

If you are someone who has herpes, the risk of transmission of herpes to your baby is small. However, there is some risk of transmission if there is a herpes lesion around your genital area while you are in labour.

In pregnancy, herpes simplex virus (HSV) may cause problems. The most likely time this can happen is if the woman has a first ever infection (primary infection) that causes symptoms in the first part of the pregnancy (may lead to miscarriage) or at the time of delivery (may infect the baby if born through the vagina). Women who are pregnant and have a sex partner who has a history of HSV may decide to use condoms for the duration of the pregnancy or the partner may take suppressive treatment through the pregnancy to reduce the risk of transmission.

The most common outcome is for the mother to pass herpes virus onto the baby at the time of delivery. By talking to your doctor about your history of herpes, precautions can be taken to prevent this from occurring.

If a woman has had herpes infection for a while, she will have developed antibodies to the virus. These protective antibodies are given to the baby via the placenta and decrease the likelihood of the baby having a severe herpes infection. However, if the mother's herpes infection is recent, she will not have developed antibodies to the herpes virus. This means that there will not have been a transfer of protective antibodies from mother to baby and the baby is therefore much more vulnerable to having a severe herpes infection.

It is also important to know that some people may have genital herpes though not recognise outbreaks when they occur because they are very insignificant in appearance. For women, they may feel an itch at their vaginal opening and may think they have thrush. It is recommended that women who experience recurrent thrush have a medical check up. It is best to go and see your health provider when you have the symptoms.

Practical Advice

HSV 1 and HSV 2 are very common in the community. It has been estimated that perhaps one in five adults have been infected with the herpes simplex type 2 virus. Most people who have herpes never know it.

Other resources:

[Sexual Health - information](https://www.qld.gov.au/health/staying-healthy/sexual-health) (<https://www.qld.gov.au/health/staying-healthy/sexual-health>)

Related Content

[Genital Herpes fact sheet](http://conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthConditions/2/Infections-Parasites/138/Sexually-Transmitted-Diseases/764/Genital-Herpes)

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