

Herpes Patient Information Leaflet

What is Herpes Simplex Virus (HSV)?

Herpes simplex virus is a common virus that can spread from person to person by direct contact. There are two virus types, HSV-1 and HSV-2.

What illness or disease is caused by HSV?

Many people who acquire HSV have no symptoms at all. Others have painful lesions and ulcers either around the mouth (cold sore) or in the genital area (genital herpes). Rarely HSV can infect broken skin (eczema herpeticum) or cause blisters on the fingers (herpetic whitlows). Infection in babies is rare but needs urgent attention as their immune system is not fully developed. If you are concerned your baby may have an infection, seek medical advice as soon as possible. Symptoms may include lethargy, irritability, not feeding, high temperature, difficulty breathing or a rash or sores on the skin, eye or inside the mouth.

How is HSV spread?

Most commonly HSV is spread from person to person via kissing or sexual contact. Some babies can become infected with HSV at birth by being in contact with a lesion on the mother's perineum. The risk to the baby is greatest when the infection occurs for the first time by a mother in pregnancy particularly if it occurs in the third trimester close to the time of delivery. If you develop a cold sore after giving birth, take the below precautions and make sure that the visitors take the same precautions too:

- Do not kiss your baby until the cold sore is fully dried and crusted

- Wash your hands before contact with your baby
- Cover up the cold sore and avoid touching the lesion.

Further information: www.rememberingeibhlin.org

Is there any treatment for HSV?

Antiviral medication is available. This can be used topically (cream or ointment) or by tablet or suspension. These antivirals are not licensed for use in pregnancy, however, they are generally considered safe and are often used, especially during the second half of pregnancy. Cold sore patches to cover the lesion is available over the counter in the chemists. Treatment during pregnancy should be discussed with your Doctor. For babies with herpes infection, IV treatment is given.

Genital herpes and pregnancy?

Genital herpes may be transmitted to your baby during labour. Please inform your doctor/midwife if you have ever had genital herpes (ulcers/painful blisters/sores) in the past or during your pregnancy. Your doctor can advise you on ways to reduce the risk of passing on the infection which may include prescribing antiviral medication and discussing the type of delivery. Women who had HSV for the first time in pregnancy can be treated with antiviral medication. Recurrent infections may be treated initially and again in the third trimester. Caesarean section may be considered if it is less than 6 weeks since an HSV episode or if there are visible lesions seen in labour.

