

## The STD hiding in plain sight

Written by NM Dept. of Health  
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SANTA FE – Some sexually transmitted disease are more common than many people think

The World Health Organization (WHO) released new numbers last week revealing more than half the world's population has at least one form of herpes.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Herpes is a common sexually transmitted disease (STD) that any sexually active person can get, and there is no cure for it.

Two types of viruses cause two types of herpes: herpes simplex type 1 and herpes simplex type 2. Type 1 affects the lips and mouth and cause fever blisters. Type 2 causes blisters that form in the genital area.

Blisters burst and turn into open sores or ulcers. Eventually, scabs form over the wounds and the sores heal. The CDC reports the whole process can take as long as four weeks to complete. A person is highly contagious while the disease is active in his or her body.

One of the reasons why herpes are so common is the only way to avoid getting them is to avoid sexual contact altogether. The CDC estimates about one out of every six people aged 14 to 49 years have genital herpes, and often people noticing mild symptoms mistake them for another skin condition, such as a pimple or ingrown hair. Because of this, the WHO estimates only one in

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12 people who have globally actually know they have it.

You can also have the virus and not have symptoms, but without signs of the disease, it can still spread to sexual partners. To find out if you have herpes, you can get tested, but it's not a test that is routinely run like tests for less common but more dangerous STDs. Often, you have to request the herpes test yourself.

Left untreated it can lead to painful genital ulcers that can be severe and persistent in persons with suppressed immune systems, but there are medicines that can prevent or shorten outbreaks. One of these herpes medicines can be taken daily, and makes it less likely you will pass the infection on to sex partner(s).

Once you have it, however, you have it, and you should tell any partner that you do and the risk involved. The CDC says using condoms may help lower this risk but it will not get rid of the risk completely.

Doctors often encourage patients to recognize while herpes is not curable, it is manageable. But anyone diagnosed with herpes needs to talk to their doctor, research ways of coping because while it can't kill you, it can affect a person's perceptions about existing or future sexual relationships.

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