

Herpes Simplex

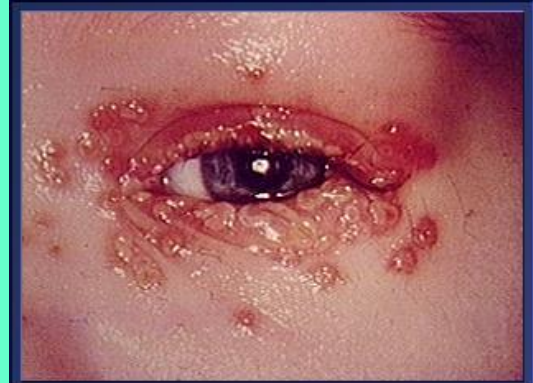
Definition

An infection caused by the herpes virus, characterized by an eruption of small and usually painful blisters on the skin.

Causes, Incidence, and Risk Factors

- Two strains of herpes viruses.
 - Herpes simplex virus type 1 (HSV-1)
 - Herpes simplex virus type 2 (HSV-2)
- HSV-1
 - infects the lips, mouth, and face.
 - It is common in children between 1 and 3 years
 - transmitted by oral and respiratory secretions
- HSV-2
 - is usually associated with genital lesions and is transmitted by sexual contact.
 - Cross-infection of type 1 and 2 viruses may occur from oral-genital sex.
- Both viruses are contagious and the first symptoms usually appear 1 or 2 weeks after contact with an infected person.

- Most people have been affected with the type 1 virus by the age of 20.
- In addition to oral and genital lesions, the virus can also cause an infection of the eye involving the eyelid, conjunctiva, and cornea.
- A finger infection, called herpetic whitlow, affects health care professionals and young children.
- The herpes virus can also infect the foetus and cause congenital abnormalities.
- Herpes virus type 2 can be transmitted to a newborn during vaginal delivery if the mother is actively infected at the time of delivery.





Herpetic Whitlow

- Infection occurs after exposure to the virus through a break in the skin, or through mucous membranes.
- There is strong evidence that the virus may be transmitted even when symptoms are not present.
- The virus spreads to nerve cells within the body, and then to other mucosal skin surfaces.
- The virus remains dormant in the body after an active infection and recurrences of the symptoms can take place at a later time.
- Recurrences may be precipitated by overexposure to sunlight, fever, stress, or certain foods and drugs.

Prevention

- Prevention is difficult since the virus can be spread to others when the infected person has no evidence of a current outbreak; however, avoiding direct contact with an open lesion will lower the risk of infection.
- In people with recurrent oral lesions, the use of sunscreen during sun exposure may reduce the frequency of outbreaks.
- People with genital herpes should avoid sexual contact when active lesions are present. **Safer sex behaviours**
- Pregnant women with herpes simplex infection should receive weekly viral cultures of the cervix and external genitalia as the delivery date approaches. At the time of delivery, if active lesions are present, or the viral culture is positive for herpes, a caesarean delivery is recommended to avoid infecting the newborn.

Symptoms

- skin rash or lesion with a burning or tingling sensation before other symptoms develop
- skin rash or lesion with itching
- mouth sores
- genital lesions
- blisters
 - anywhere on the skin
 - most frequent on the mouth, lips, conjunctiva and cornea of the eye, and the genitalia
 - smaller blisters merge to form a larger blister
 - yellow crusts form on blisters at the beginning of healing (7 to 10 days)
- mild fever
- enlargement of lymph nodes in the neck or groin

Signs and Tests

- Physical findings of blisters may be sufficient to diagnose herpes simplex.

The following tests may (occasionally) be performed:

- viral culture of lesion
- oropharynx lesion biopsy
- culture from endocervix
- Tzanck test

Treatment

- Most cases need no treatment.
- Gentle cleansing of skin lesions with soap and water.
- Petroleum based ointments should not be used because they promote viral spread and delay healing.
- Oral acyclovir (**Zovirax**) may be prescribed to suppress recurrent eruptions of genital herpes.
- Topical Zovirax for facial outbreaks.
- Antibiotic for secondary infections

Prognosis

- Lesions generally resolve within 7 to 10 days.
- Once infected, the virus stays in the body for the rest of a person's life.
- Some people never have another episode, and some have 4 or 5 recurrences a year.
- Subsequent infections tend to occur after exposure to the sun and stressful events.

Complications

- encephalitis
- severe, generalized infection in an immunosuppressed person



