

Herpes simplex encephalitis (HSE) is a rare neurological disorder characterized by inflammation of the brain (encephalitis). Common symptoms include headaches, fevers, drowsiness, hyperactivity, and/or general weakness. The disorder may have some symptoms similar to those associated with meningitis, such as a stiff neck, altered reflexes, confusion, and/or speech abnormalities. Skin lesions usually are not found in association with herpes simplex encephalitis. Herpes simplex encephalitis is caused by a virus known as herpes simplex virus (HSV). Herpes simplex encephalitis usually occurs during early childhood or adulthood. It affects males and females in equal numbers. The disorder is the most common form of acute encephalitis in the United States with approximately 2,000 cases occurring per year. It accounts for 10 percent of all cases of encephalitis in the United States per year. A diagnosis of idiopathic herpes simplex encephalitis is made based upon a detailed patient history, a thorough clinical evaluation, identification of classic symptoms, and a variety of specialized tests. These tests include polymerase chain reaction (PCR) in cerebrospinal fluid (CSF), which may confirm infection of CSF with the herpes simplex virus. In some cases, advanced imaging techniques such as computed tomography and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) can also be beneficial in diagnosing a case of herpes simplex encephalitis.