

# Herpes Simplex Virus Culture and Typing



## Does this test have other names?

Viral isolation

## What is this test?

This test looks for which type of herpes simplex virus (HSV) is causing your infection.

HSV is a common virus that comes in 2 types: HSV1 and HSV2. Each type of HSV causes a number of health problems. Viral culture is the best test to confirm a herpes simplex infection.

HSV1 is more common. It's carried in saliva and typically causes outbreaks of cold sores around the mouth.

HSV2 affects the genitals and is spread by sexual contact. HSV1 can cause genital outbreaks, too, often from oral sex. Herpes sores can also develop on the hands and buttocks, around the eyes, and across large areas of the body.

This test works better in people having a first outbreak of HSV rather than those with recurring infections.

## Why do I need this test?

You may need this test to find out whether you have a herpes infection. With outbreaks on the face, symptoms can include:

- Sore throat
- Tiredness
- Muscle soreness
- Swollen lymph nodes in the neck
- Sores on the lips, tongue, face, palate, and gums

Genital HSV infections can cause:

- Fever
- Headache
- Tiredness
- Muscle soreness
- Painful urination
- Itching
- Discharge from the penis or vagina
- Painful genital sores (ulcers)

You may also need this test if you have symptoms of meningitis, or inflammation of the protective membranes covering the brain. HSV can also cause meningitis. Symptoms include:

- Stiff neck

- Fever
- Headache
- Vomiting
- Eye pain when looking at light (photophobia)

You may also need this test if you have symptoms of encephalitis, or brain inflammation. Symptoms include:

- Fever
- Trouble thinking clearly
- Flushing
- Sweating
- Changes in taste and smell

## What other tests might I have along with this test?

Your healthcare provider may also order other tests to check for:

- HSV DNA in sores
- Antibodies against HSV in your blood

If your provider suspects that your brain has been affected by the infection, they may order a viral DNA test of your cerebrospinal fluid, the fluid around your brain and spinal cord.

## What do my test results mean?

Test results may vary depending on your age, gender, health history, and other things. Your test results may be different depending on the lab used. They may not mean you have a problem. Ask your healthcare provider what your test results mean for you.

Test results are generally available in 1 to 2 days. Normal results are negative, meaning that no HSV was found in your sample. Positive results mean that HSV was found. The results may also show which type of HSV you have.

## How is this test done?

This test is done with a sample of fluid from a herpes sore or from genital secretions. Your healthcare provider will collect the sample by gently pressing a soft swab into one or more sores, or placing the swab on the tip of the penis or in the vagina.

## Does this test pose any risks?

You may feel mild pain when the healthcare provider takes the sample from a sore.

## What might affect my test results?

Washing the sores with certain cleansers, including alcohol, may kill the virus and affect your results. If sores have started to heal, they may be less likely to have the virus.

## How do I get ready for this test?

You don't need to get ready for this test. Be sure your healthcare provider knows about all medicines, herbs, vitamins, and supplements you are taking. This includes medicines that don't need a prescription and any illegal drugs you may use.

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