**[News](http://www.britishskinfoundation.org.uk/Home.aspx)**

* Search   **[Search](javascript:__doPostBack('dnn$dnnSearch$cmdSearch',''))**

**Herpes Simplex**

**What is herpes simplex?**

Herpes simplex is an infection of the skin with the herpes simplex virus. This can be caught from another person after direct skin-to-skin contact, mouth contact, or sexual contact. The first time the virus is caught, it does not always show up on the skin, but can lie dormant within special parts of the sensory nerves (the sensory nerve ganglia). Later in life, the virus can become active again and appear as herpes simplex on the skin. The commonest areas to be affected by herpes simplex are the lips (as cold sores) and the genital area (as genital herpes).

**Is herpes simplex hereditary?**

No.

**What does herpes simplex feel like and what does it look like?**

The very first infection is often un-noticed as it may only produce a short-lived redness of the skin. Sometimes, however, a first infection can make a person feel very unwell with a temperature, swollen lymph glands and soreness and blisters in the mouth and on the lips or elsewhere on the skin.

When the herpes simplex virus infection becomes active again, the first symptom is a burning or stinging pain at the affected site, followed by pink bumps and small blisters. The blisters quickly dry and crust over, and the areas usually heal over within a few days. Repeated attacks usually occur in roughly the same place each time.

If Herpes simplex virus infects the eye it causes pain, sensitivity to light and discharge and can cause scarring.

**How is herpes simplex diagnosed?**

Usually the appearance of skin affected by herpes simplex is enough to make a diagnosis. Sometimes a surface swab is taken, but getting the result usually takes a few days. If you think you have herpes in the genital area, you can be seen quickly at your local Genito-Urinary Medicine (GUM) or Sexual Health clinic.

**Can herpes simplex be cured?**

Symptoms clear in a few days or weeks, with or without treatment, though the virus will remain in a dormant state in the body.  In a majority of patients, recurrent symptoms are mild and infrequent, or do not happen at all.  For a minority, troublesome recurrences can usually be prevented by using oral anti-viral drugs or adopting lifestyle changes.

Things that encourage the virus to be more active are:

Other infections such as colds or ‘flu.   
Getting tired and run-down.   
Sunburn   
A skin injury, such as an operation or a graze, at the place where the virus shows itself at the surface 

For more information about available treatments please visit [this page](http://www.bad.org.uk/site/824/Default.aspx)on the website of the British Association of Dermatologists

