

## **Herpes Simplex**

What is herpes simplex?

Herpes simplex is a common viral infection that presents with localised blistering. It affects most people on one or more occasions during their lives.

Herpes simplex is commonly referred to as cold sores or fever blisters, as recurrences are often triggered by a febrile illness, such as a cold.

Type 1 HSV is mainly associated with oral and facial infections

Type 2 HSV is mainly associated with genital and rectal infections (anogenital herpes)

However, either virus can affect almost any area of skin or mucous membrane.

After the primary episode of infection, HSV resides in a latent state in spinal dorsal root nerves that supply sensation to the skin. During a recurrence, the virus follows the nerves onto the skin or mucous membranes, where it multiplies, causing the clinical lesion. After each attack and lifelong, it enters the resting state.

During an attack, the virus can be inoculated into new sites of skin, which can then develop blisters as well as the original site of infection.

Recurrent herpes simplex

After the initial infection, whether symptomatic or not, there may be no further clinical manifestations throughout life. Where viral immunity is insufficient, recurrent infections are common, particularly with Type 2 genital herpes.

Recurrences can be triggered by:

Minor trauma, surgery or procedures to the affected area

Upper respiratory tract infections

Sun exposure

Hormonal factors (in women, flares are not uncommon prior to menstruation)

Emotional stress

In many cases, no reason for the eruption is evident.

How is herpes simplex diagnosed?

If there is clinical doubt, HSV can be confirmed by culture or PCR of a viral swab taken from fresh vesicles. HSV serology is not very informative, as it's positive in most individuals and thus not specific for the lesion with which they present.

What is the treatment for herpes simplex?

Mild, uncomplicated eruptions of herpes simplex require no treatment. Blisters may be covered if desired, for example with a hydrocolloid patch. Severe infection may require treatment with an oral antiviral agent.