

sextalk.

answers to your questions about sex and relationships

factoid

Need urgent medical advice, but Campus Health is closed? Call the "After Hours" number – 570-7898 – where a Campus Health medical provider is always on call.

Q. Help – I just kissed a guy that I don't know, and now I'm concerned about oral herpes. Should I be worried about it? How do I know if I contracted the disease?

A. Oral herpes is an infection caused by the herpes simplex virus (HSV), characterized by small, usually painful blisters appearing on the lips, mouth, gums or the skin around the mouth. These blisters are commonly referred to as "cold sores" or "fever blisters".

There are two types of HSV – type 1 most often associated with oral herpes, and type 2 most often associated with genital herpes. However, both types can occur in either the genitals, oral area or both, usually resulting from cross-infection caused by oral-genital contact (i.e., oral sex).

HSV type 1 is actually a very common disease. It's estimated that up to 80% of Americans are infected with the type 1 virus by the age of 20. Most often, it's contracted during childhood as a result of a friendly kiss by a well-meaning, but infected, relative or family friend.

People who've been infected with the herpes virus will most often experience symptoms within 1-3 weeks after exposure with the infected person. The blisters will usually last for 7-10 days, and then begin to disappear.

The best prevention for oral herpes is to avoid direct contact with cold sores or other herpes lesions (either on the mouth or on the genitals). This also means no kissing or sharing of items that might require you to come in contact with the saliva of an infected person (e.g., sharing drinks/food, or lipsticks/lip moisturizers).

If you develop symptoms that appear to be a herpes infection, visit your health care provider as soon as possible (within 48 hours is best). Your provider will order a culture to test whether the lesion is herpes-related.

References: MedlinePlus Medical Encyclopedia (www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus), American Social Health Association (www.ashastd.org), Planned Parenthood (www.plannedparenthood.org/sti/herpes.htm)

Have a question? Send it to sextalk@email.arizona.edu

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