

sextalk.

answers to your questions about sex and relationships

factoid

About 1 in 4 U.S. adults has genital herpes, but most don't know they're infected because their symptoms are too mild to notice or are mistaken for another condition. (American Social Health Association, www.ashastd.org)

Q. Recently, I let a guy perform oral sex on me. Now, I'm noticing a burning and stinking sensation when I pee, and very large blisters around the outside of my vagina and anus. I'm very worried this is herpes. Could it be anything else?!

A. Visit your health care provider immediately. The symptoms you describe – burning urination, blisters on genitals – are highly characteristic of herpes infection. Your provider will likely perform a culture test (lightly swabbing the lesion to obtain a sample of fluid) and send it to a lab for further confirmation. A culture test is most accurate when it is performed within 48 hours of a lesion's appearance.

A "stinking" vaginal odor is not characteristic of herpes. Therefore, it's possible you've contracted some other type of infection as well. Your provider will be able to diagnose and treat the condition. Call the Campus Health Service Women's Health Clinic, 621-9202, for an appointment.

Q. I was recently diagnosed with cold sores on my lips and tip of my nose. I also get canker sores around or inside my mouth. Is it safe to perform oral sex if herpes is not present on my lips but on my nose, with canker sores inside my mouth?

A. Although cold sores are more likely to appear on the outside of the mouth, it is possible to develop a cold sore inside the mouth making it difficult to distinguish from a canker sore. Given that you know you have herpes, it would be best to treat all sores in and around your mouth as cold sores.

Cold sores, caused by herpes simplex virus, are extremely contagious. The surest way to prevent transmission to an uninfected partner is to abstain from giving oral sex until sores have completely healed. However, herpes simplex virus may also be transmitted in the absence of obvious outbreaks (asymptomatic transmission). Therefore, the safest method of performing oral sex is to use a protective barrier (e.g., latex dam, condom) that completely covers your partner's genital area.

As a general rule, it is best to use safer sex methods in all new sexual encounters as there is a large percentage of people who have STDs who are unaware of it and show no obvious symptoms.

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

SexTalk is written by Lee Ann Hamilton, M.A., CHES, Melissa McGee, Ph.D., MPH & David Salafsky, MPH, health educators at The University of Arizona Campus Health Service.

