Dear Alice,

This service is a God-send. I feel more informed than I did a few days ago.

I have a few questions regarding Herpes Simplex 2. Can you be tested for the virus even if an active sore is NOT present? And what are the signs to know if the virus is shedding even if there are no sores or related pain?

— Want to be safe

(2)
Dear Alice,

My ex-girlfriend had (has) genital herpes. We always used condoms, and never had sex during outbreaks. I don't have any symptoms, but am worried about possibly being asymptomatic. I want to start new relationships, but I'm reluctant because I don't know what to tell new partners. Is there a reliable test for asymptomatic people?

— Anxious to resume

Answer

Dear Want to be safe and Anxious to resume,

Many people are concerned about getting or giving herpes to another, especially since herpes has no cure. They also are worried since herpes may be spread when a person has no symptoms.

Blood tests for herpes simplex virus type 2 (HSV-2), the most common cause of genital herpes, are available. These blood tests can be used when someone is concerned about having been exposed to herpes, but has no visible symptoms. However, they vary in accuracy. For more details about herpes testing, including some specific recommended tests, look at the American Sexual Health Association’s (ASHA) Herpes Resource Center web site.
Twenty to thirty percent of U.S. adults are believed to have HSV-2 antibodies. That percent is pretty high. Without doubt, most of those people are unaware of being infected. In a study done in an STD clinic, clinicians found that 60 percent of infected women never had any symptoms, and another 16 percent had no recent symptoms. Are they all contagious? How contagious? Were some never contagious? We just don't know the answers to these questions.

Asymptomatic signs or viral shedding is difficult to determine. Some people, however, can tell before an outbreak is about to occur. They feel more irritable, on edge, and may have a tingling or itchy sensation at the site where the blister is going to form.

In each of your situations, it is likely that you are not infected or that you developed a strong immune response early in your life or after you became sexually active. Continue practicing safer sex and discussing the many reasons you do so with your future partner(s). Whether or not you or a partner has herpes, other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), such as chlamydia and gonorrhea, don't always have symptoms.
Go Ask Alice! is not an emergency or instant response service.

If you are in an urgent situation, please visit our Emergency page to view a list of 24 hour support services and hotlines.

Source URL: https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/testing-asymptomatic-herpes

Links
[1] https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/testing-asymptomatic-herpes