Genital Herpes

Genital herpes is caused by types 1 and 2 of the herpes simplex virus (HSV), although HSV type 2 is typically responsible for genital infections in both men and women. Patients who are infected with the herpes simplex virus may not exhibit clinical symptoms, while others may develop small, painful, vesicular lesions, and exhibit flu-like symptoms, such as fever, headache, fatigue, and muscle pain. It is important to remember that patients are infectious during recurrences of the infection. Recurrences, however, are not caused by reinfection by the herpes virus, but rather due to viral shedding. Antiviral medications such as acyclovir, valacyclovir, and famciclovir are used to treat HSV infections or to prevent recurrences.



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Mechanism

Herpes Simplex Virus 1 and 2 (HSV)
Herpes-harp with (1) Wand and (2) Tutu
Types 1 and 2 of the herpes simplex virus may cause a genital herpes infection, although HSV type 2 is typically responsible for infection of the genital area in men and women.

Assessment

May Be Asymptomatic
Thumbs-up with Maybe
Patients infected with the herpes simplex virus may not exhibit clinical symptoms.

Oral or Genital Lesions
Mouth and Genital-gentleman with Leeches
Lesions, or “fever blisters,” may appear on the oral mucosa or genitals. Lesions are usually small and vesicular. Lesions can be painful, but painless lesions may also appear on infected sites. When the lesions rupture, a shallow, moist ulceration forms. Primary lesions persist for 17-20 days. However, new lesions may continue to develop for up to 6 weeks.

Vesicles in Clusters
Vests in Cluster
Blisters or vesicles associated with a genital herpes infection typically appear in clusters on the affected area.

Pain
Pain-bolt
Herpes blisters may be painful. Genital herpes lesions can also cause pain during urination.

Flu-like Symptoms
Thermometer and Ice-bag
Patients infected with the herpes virus may also experience flu-like symptoms, including fever, headache, fatigue, muscle pain, and regional swelling of the lymph nodes. These symptoms typically occur with the primary or initial episode of genital herpes.

Antiviral Medications

Acyclovir
Apple-cyclops
Acyclovir is not a cure for genital herpes. However, Acyclovir can reduce outbreaks/recurrences and shorten a patient’s healing time and duration of viral shedding. It can be given to pregnant women at least 36 weeks into gestation to prevent neonatal transmission of HSV.

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Valacyclovir

Veil-cyclops

Valacyclovir can be used to treat genital herpes infection, but it is important to remember that it is not a cure. Valacyclovir works by inhibiting the replication of the herpes virus.

Famciclovir

Fan-cyclops

Famciclovir can be used to treat both primary and recurrent herpes infections. This antiviral medication works by inhibiting the replication of the herpes virus.

Considerations

Infectious During Recurrences

Infectious During Breakouts

It is important to remember that patients are infectious during recurrences of the infection. Recurrences, however, are not caused by reinfection by the herpes virus but rather due to viral shedding. Recurrences can be triggered by stress, fatigue, sunburn, acute illness, immunosuppression, and menses. Prodromal symptoms include tingling, burning, and itching at the site where lesions typically reappear. An HSV infection at the time of delivery poses a high risk of transmission to the neonate. At the time of delivery, if there are active genital lesions, cesarean delivery may be indicated.

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