

Genital Herpes

Why is Genital Herpes important?

Genital herpes is a sexually transmitted viral infection. Unlike some of the other sexually transmitted diseases, it is not curable with antibiotics. Rather, it is a recurrent, lifelong infection where the symptoms can be decreased with specific medications. This fact alone makes it important because once an individual has contracted the disease they will have it for life, unless a cure is found.

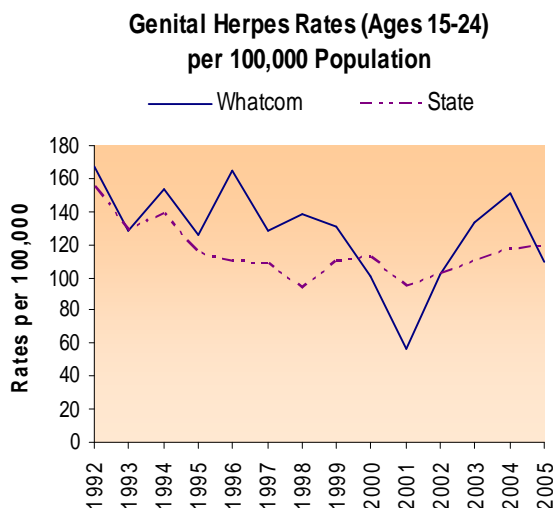
Symptoms of genital herpes vary widely. Some infections produce no symptoms, although the disease is still communicable. On the other hand, first outbreaks of the disease may be quite severe with painful genital sores, tiredness, and fever. Symptoms may recur at the initial infection site. It is not known what causes these recurrences. Genital herpes, like other genital ulcer diseases, increases the risk of acquiring HIV. Becoming infected while pregnant can cause severe disease in, or even death of, a newborn.

How are we doing?

Only a patient's first episode of genital herpes is reportable in Washington. Therefore, genital herpes rates reflect the number of persons found to be infected, not the number of viral episodes that occur and can infect others. The following chart and table provide a comparison of reported genital herpes rates in Washington and Whatcom County for the ages 15-24 from 1992 through 2005.

**Genital Herpes Rates & Cases (Ages 15-24)
Per 100,000 Population**

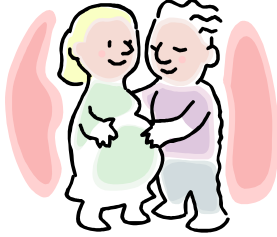
Year	Whatcom County		Washington State	
	Rate per 100,000 Population (Ages 15-24)	# of Cases	Rate per 100,000 Population (Ages 15-24)	# of Cases
1992	168	39	155	1,082
1993	129	31	128	914
1994	154	38	138	994
1995	126	32	115	839
1996	165	43	110	811
1997	129	35	108	818
1998	138	39	93	727
1999	131	39	109	872
2000	101	31	112	918
2001	57	18	95	794
2002	102	33	102	869
2003	133	44	110	957
2004	151	51	117	1,028
2005	110	38	118	1,063



Although Whatcom County's rates have generally been higher than the state, in 2000, 2001, and 2005 the rates were lower. Also, higher rates may reflect better reporting by clinics such as Mt. Baker Planned Parenthood, which serves the majority of patients in this age group.

What remains to be done?

Healthcare providers who diagnose genital herpes should provide recommended patient education, including never having sex when herpes sores are present and using condoms consistently and correctly if the affected area can be covered. Appropriate medications to decrease symptoms may be prescribed.



Pregnant women, in particular, should receive screening and counseling. Research shows that about 60-70 percent of genital herpes is spread by people who don't know they have it, so prevention efforts—outside of general education—are difficult to implement.