

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE :

"There is no doubt that more cases of first time genital herpes are being diagnosed each year," said Marian Nicholson, Director of the Herpes Viruses Association, "but several factors need to be borne in mind when we look at these figures.

"The first factor is the dramatic reduction in waiting times for clinic appointments - this means that many more cases are being diagnosed because the patient is able to get to a doctor before symptoms clear up. No symptoms on the day of examination = no diagnosis.

"Also, as the Health Protection Agency points out, because of the greater use of more sensitive tests, cases are being diagnosed that otherwise would be missed. [1]

"Another factor is that the figures we see here represent the tip of a very big iceberg - the prevalence of herpes simplex, facial and genital combined, **in the adult population is up to 80% - this is a ubiquitous condition.**

"The increasing popularity of oral sex in the last fifty years has meant that it is now likely that more than half the cases of genital herpes are caused by HSV1 - the facial cold sore virus, and not the classic HSV2 genital variety. Many more teenagers are now beginning sexual activity without the benefit of having already acquired HSV1 (cold sores) as children. This means that they are more likely to experience genital symptoms because they have not previously been, 'vaccinated by life'.

"The HVA calls on the DoH to acquire and publish separate data on HSV1 and HSV2 acquisition so that we know exactly what is going on."

Herpes simplex is unfairly stigmatised. Around 75% of those infected never get diagnosed because they have no symptoms or only mild symptoms - a pimple, perhaps. It is wrong that the minority who are diagnosed should be made to feel bad about a condition that most of the rest of us carry unknowingly.

- Ends -

NOTES FOR EDITORS:

Genital herpes simplex virus infection is common with 26,200 new cases diagnosed in sexual health clinics the UK in 2007. [1] A further 45,000, on average, will be diagnosed by GPs each year. [2]

References

[1] http://www.hpa.org.uk/web/HPAweb&HPAwebStandard/HPAweb_C/1203348026613

[2] Woolley PD, Chandio S. Survey of the management of general herpes in general practice. International Journal of STDs and AIDS 1996;7(3);206-211

Herpes Viruses Association (HVA)

The HVA exists to promote better mental and physical health with regard to the family of herpes viruses. Its aims are:

1. To provide information to the public, to medical professionals and to the media.
2. To encourage the development of new treatments for herpes simplex.
3. To tackle stigma and the unnecessary trauma associated with the condition.

As well as treatment advice, the HVA runs a helpline, which provides emotional support and advice to many people diagnosed with genital herpes or facial cold sores every year.

Helpline for the general public: 0845 123 2305

Website: www.herpes.org.uk

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