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## Non-sexual herpes transmission?

### Question

<p>Dear Alice,</p>

<p>What are causes, other than sexual contact, of herpes?</p>

<p>Signed,<br>

Wondering</p>

### Answer

<p>Dear Wondering,</p>&#13;

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<p>Sex is one common way that herpes is spread, but it can be spread in other ways as well. It may be that you're having some confusion between causes of the symptoms of herpes and the routes of viral transmission between two people. Herpes is caused by the Herpes Simplex Virus (HSV), which has two types: HSV-1 and HSV-2. HSV-1 is the most frequent cause of oral herpes, and HSV-2 is the most frequent cause of genital herpes. However, both viruses may cause oral and genital infections with virtually identical symptoms.</p>&#13;

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<p>The herpes virus enters the body through the skin and mucous membranes (especially the mouth and genitals) and travels along the nerve endings to the base of the spine, where it remains by feeding off nutrients produced by the body cells. As such, the more common causes of herpes transmission are kissing, or direct skin-to-skin contact during vaginal, anal, or oral sex with someone who has an active infection. It is possible, however, to spread the virus via the fingers (i.e., if someone touches an active sore and then touches a mucous membrane), including manual stimulation and masturbation. For this reason it is imperative not to touch active sores in your mouth or on your genitals, and, if you do, to wash your hands as soon as possible afterwards. It's recommended that people with active sores (regardless of location) avoid intimate contact until the sores are completely healed.</p>&#13;

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<p>Additional, though much less likely, transmission may occur from a person who has herpes with no sores presently active through the shedding of virus particles from the skin of the infected person and contact with the mucous membranes of another person (called asymptomatic transmission). Science is still trying to determine how to know when an asymptomatic person is shedding virus.</p>&#13;

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<p>Transmission of the virus via routes like sharing bed linen, clothing, towels, toilet seats, eating utensils, shared cups/glasses, and in public spas is less likely. The take home message is that the majority of herpes cases are spread through intimate (though not always sexual) contact. No need to be overly worried about non-person contact. Wondering's great when it leads to finding answers to break myths like how viruses (including herpes) are shared!</p>&#13;

Health topic

Header: 2

Sexual & Reproductive Health  
Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)  
Herpes

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**Source URL:** *:///answered-questions/non-sexual-herpes-transmission*

**List of links present in page**

- *:///answered-questions/non-sexual-herpes-transmission*
- *:///category/sexual-reproductive-health*
- *:///category/sexually-transmitted-infections-stis*
- *:///category/herpes*
- *:///node/17383/printable/print*