

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Genital Herpes: Managing a Public Health Concern

~ New Canadian treatment guidelines provide much - needed direction ~

TORONTO, Ontario (April 26, 2006) – In spite of significant progress made in the management of many sexually transmitted infections, genital herpes continues to pose a public health concern for sexually active Canadians. There is no cure for genital herpes and it is estimated that up to one-in-five Canadians is currently infected.ⁱ Even more problematic – approximately 80 per cent are unaware they are infected, which means they cannot take preventative measures to stop the spread.ⁱⁱ

There is positive news however. Through responsible condom use and antiviral therapy, people infected with genital herpes may be supported towards a healthy and satisfying sex life without spreading the virus. To assist physicians in working with patients, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) has released new clinical guidelines. The guidelines provide up-to-date recommendations on evidence-based care for people with genital herpes, including diagnosis, transmission prevention, management, treatment and counselling.

“Despite advances in our understanding how genital herpes is transmitted and needs to be treated, infection rates continue to rise. This may be due to a lack of awareness of prevalence and risk, as well as a social stigma that hinders people from informing new partners or even seeing a doctor,” says Dr. Barbara Romanowski, Clinical Professor in the Division of Infectious Diseases, Department of Medicine, University of Alberta, and editor of the clinical section of the PHAC guidelines which includes the chapter on genital herpes. “These new genital herpes treatment guidelines provide physicians with information to effectively address the subject with patients. This open communication is the cornerstone to stopping the spread of genital herpes.”

With an increase in prevalence of 30 per cent over the last three decadesⁱⁱⁱ, genital herpes is caused by herpes simplex virus (type 1 or 2) – a highly contagious and incurable virus.^{iv} In addition to painful lesions and open sores, the infection can lead to serious physical and psychological consequences, including depression, an increased risk for HIV infection, and serious clinical complications to a fetus/newborn.

The new treatment guidelines include the following recommendations for physicians:^v

- Work with patients to review and monitor prevention practices, identify barriers to prevention and the means to overcome them. Inform patients that condom use reduces transmission of genital herpes.
- Educate patients on the natural history of the disease with emphasis on the potential for recurrent

episodes, asymptomatic shedding and sexual transmission. Up to 70 per cent of transmissions occur when there are no obvious signs or symptoms (asymptomatic viral shedding).

- Advise patients to inform their sexual partner(s) of the infection. Resources are available to facilitate this discussion in order to provide patients with advice when needed.
- Advise patients that oral antiviral treatments are available. In addition to reducing the frequency of outbreaks in infected people, antiviral medication can prevent transmission of the virus. The effect of condoms and antiviral therapy may be additive.
- Recognize that many people with genital herpes become depressed and feel isolated. Ensure empathetic and knowledgeable ongoing counselling is provided not only for those diagnosed with genital herpes but for their partners as well.

“When I was first diagnosed with genital herpes I thought that I could never again have a meaningful relationship, but then I realized that there are ways to deal with it. I also realized that it is my responsibility to ensure I did not give the virus to anyone else,” says Jerry,* a member of the Phoenix Association, a support group for people with genital herpes. “If you have genital herpes, go talk to your doctor about what you can do to better manage and prevent infection in your partner. You can make a difference.”

There are numerous resources and treatments available to help manage genital herpes. Information can be easily and discretely accessed by visiting www.herpeshhealth.com or calling 1-866-252-4666. The Herpes Health Pack™, containing educational materials for patients, is available through physicians. For more information about the Public Health Agency of Canada guidelines on genital herpes, visit http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/std-mts/sti_2006/pdf/genital_herpes_virus_e.pdf.

ABOUT HERPESHEALTH.COM

Herpeshealth.com was developed by Canadian doctors who are experts in managing and treating people with genital herpes. Content on Herpeshealth.com is reviewed by physicians to ensure that the most recent and relevant information is available to visitors.

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** A pseudonym is being used to protect privacy*

ⁱ Retrieved and accessed on April 6, 2006 from http://www.gsk.ca/en/media_room/news/040224.php

ⁱⁱ Retrieved and accessed on April 6, 2006 from <http://www.herpesresourcecentre.com/mvf.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ Retrieved and accessed on April 26, 2005 <http://content.nejm.org/cgi/content/abstract/337/16/1105> under:

Conclusions

^{iv} Herpes Health Pack™. Genital Herpes: The Facts; page 4

^v Retrieved and accessed on April 6, 2006 from the Public Health Agency of Canada Web site - Early release of selected chapters from the Canadian Guidelines on Sexually Transmitted Infections 2006 Edition., Genital Herpes Simplex Virus (HSV) Infections (February 2006), http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/std-mts/sti_2006/pdf/genital_herpes_virus_e.pdf.