Impetigo + oral sex = genital herpes?  [1]

Hey Alice!

I was recently diagnosed with impetigo & was wondering if I had oral sex with my boyfriend if he'd get genital herpes. Thanks!

-kitten xx

Answer

Dear kitten,

The quick answer is nope! If you have been diagnosed with impetigo, oral sex with your boyfriend could transmit the impetigo to him but it won't cause genital herpes. While impetigo is a contagious skin infection, it's caused by bacteria (either staphylococcus or streptococcus strain) while herpes simplex (both type 1 and type 2) are caused by viral infections. It's true that both of these skin infections are contagious and can be passed on by sexual contact, but impetigo infections can't cause herpes outbreaks and vice versa.

Let's chat a bit more about impetigo: It is a very contagious skin infection, one that is often seen in babies and children. The infection will usually appear as red sores on the face, often clustering around the nose and mouth, and when they burst the sores develop yellow or honey-colored crusts after a few days. Unless the condition clears up on its own (typically in a couple of weeks), a doctor will prescribe an antibiotic to accelerate healing and limit how contagious the condition is. Bullous impetigo is a different, less common form of the disease, which will appear as larger blisters on the trunk or groin area. Ecthyma is another more severe form, which will cause painful fluid or pus-filled sores that can become ulcers deep in the skin (this type happens more commonly in older adults with diabetes or a compromised immune system).

Impetigo is transmitted by touching the sores of an infected person or by coming into contact with items that they have touched like clothing, linen, towels, or in the case of children (or big kids at heart), toys. Impetigo can start because bacteria have gotten into a small cut or insect bite, or even a scratch on the skin. Impetigo is entirely curable with antibiotics. Impetigo is not usually dangerous however sometimes there are complications. Ecthyma has been known to cause scars and one type of bacteria can cause kidney damage.

Herpes, on the other hand, is transmitted by the viruses HSV-1, HSV-2, or the herpes varicellus-zoster virus. (See What is herpes? [2] for information on the difference between the
viral strains and the possible resulting conditions. For even more info, visit the Go Ask Alice! Herpes [3] archive.) Herpes is transmitted through skin-to-skin contact, and unlike impetigo it’s pretty unlikely that just sharing a towel or t-shirt with someone that is infected will lead to contracting the virus. While there’s no cure for herpes, medication can help manage outbreaks.

Until the bacteria causing the impetigo infection has been eradicated, the condition is highly contagious, so it might be best for you and your boyfriend to take a break from sexual contact until then.

Here’s to a speedy healing so you can go back to playing like the kitten you are!

Alice!
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