CDC: Nearly 50% of Black Women Ages 14 to 49 Have Genital Herpes

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Almost one in every two African-American women ages 14 to 49 has genital herpes, as does two out of every five blacks in that age group, according to data presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at an STD Prevention Conference last week and reported on by the *Los Angeles Times*. In addition, one out of six Americans in general is living with the virus.

Genital herpes, also known as herpes simplex virus type 2 or HSV-2, is the most common sexually transmitted infection in the United States.

“The message is that herpes is quite common,” said John M. Douglas Jr., MD, during a telephone news conference. “Many individuals are transmitting herpes to others without even knowing it.”

The high rate of genital herpes in the black community might be partially responsible for the high incidence of HIV among African Americans, explained Kevin Fenton, MD, director of the CDC’s National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD and TB Prevention. Research shows that people with genital herpes are two to three more times likely to contract HIV. In addition, HIV-positive people with HSV-2 are more likely to transmit HIV to their partners. About 80 percent of people with the herpes virus are not aware that they have it.

Herpes type 2 can cause recurrent genital sores. There is no cure, but medications can stem the outbreaks and halve the chance of spreading the virus.

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