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Condoms against herpes

DO condoms, which provide significant protection against HIV, offer similar protection against herpes simplex virus 2 (HSV-2), which causes genital herpes?

A study combined data from six studies, involving 5,384 men and women (average age, 29) who were HSV-2 negative when their study began. During the study periods, which ranged from six to 19 months, the virus was diagnosed in 415 people, women more often than men.

Those who always used a condom were 30% less likely to have acquired the virus than were those who never used condoms. The more often people had unprotected sex, the greater their risk for infection.

Who may be affected? People who have

unprotected sex. HSV-2 is spread most often by skin-to-skin contact. Because there is no cure, genital herpes is considered a life-long infection.

Caveats: Data on condom use were provided by the study participants. The authors theorised that the risk reduction for HSV-2 was so much less than the nearly 90% reduction for HIV because HIV is transmitted through bodily fluids, which a condom can contain, whereas HSV-2 can be spread through skin contact in areas not protected by the condom.

You can find this study in the July 13 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. Learn more about genital herpes at www.mayoclinic.com and www.niaid.nih.gov/topics. – LAT-WP