

A Bad First Impression

Joe found everything about college exciting. As a freshman at a small private university, he was on his own for the first time ...and very pleased with how well he was handling all of the new curves that had been thrown his way. Joe was working harder than he ever had before, and was earning A's and B's in all of his courses. He was playing well on the JV soccer team and occasionally even got to play with the varsity squad. Just when Joe couldn't believe things could be better, he met Amy at a campus party. They hit it off immediately and quickly decided that they wanted to take their relationship to the next level. Joe had never had sexual relations with a woman before but, wanting to be responsible, purchased condoms.

About 5 days after their first sexual encounter, Joe woke up feeling "flu-ish." His muscles ached. He felt fatigued and even a bit feverish. Joe's real concern, however, was the appearance of genital vesicles. Joe didn't know whether to be embarrassed or concerned. He avoided Amy and hoped that his extra hygiene efforts would solve the problem. Unfortunately, two days after the emergence of the vesicles, they opened forming painful, reddened ulcers with swollen bases. Joe went to the student health center where the physician confirmed his fears of having contracted a sexually transmitted disease (STD).

- 1. What STD do you suspect Joe has contracted?**
- 2. What is the causative agent involved?**
- 3. What clinical test(s) might Joe's physician order to confirm this diagnosis?**

Joe's physician prescribed acyclovir.

- 4. How does this drug work?**
- 5. Will it cure Joe's condition?**

6. Are there any notable side effects of using this drug?

Following his diagnosis, Joe confronted Amy. She admitted that Joe was not her first sexual experience. While Joe was hurt that she hadn't volunteered that information before they became intimately involved, he was truly angry when she emphatically denied being infected herself. Amy swore she has never had any lesions. Devastated, Joe ended the relationship. How could he have misjudged Amy so terribly? He felt she hadn't been honest with him about anything.

7. Had Amy lied to Joe about never having an outbreak of genital lesions?

8. What do you know about symptom expression in this disease?

9. Can a person be contagious in the absence of symptoms? Elaborate.

Two months later, Joe returned to the student health center as the ulcerations had reappeared. He was very upset. He knew that he would have recurrent outbreaks, but this was only two months later. Luckily, he at least wasn't experiencing the aches and fever this time.

10. Is Joe's rapid recurrence normal in a newly infected patient?

11. How long does an outbreak usually last? Explain how healing differs when lesions are located on dry versus moist surfaces.

12. Why didn't Joe have the accompanying flu-like symptoms he had initially experienced?

13. How does latency occur in this disease?

14. What factors can reactivate the infection?

15. Joe used standard “safe sex” precautions. How could he have become infected?

16. Get on-line and investigate the epidemiology of this disease.

- a. How many Americans suffer from this disease? Why is this number not exact?**
- b. How has this number changed in the last 25 years?**
- c. Are certain ethnic groups disproportionately infected?**