

## Herpes gladiatorum

### **What is *Herpes gladiatorum*?**

*Herpes gladiatorum* is a viral skin infection caused by Herpes Simplex virus type 1 (HSV-1), which is the same virus that causes cold sores on the lips.

### **How does *Herpes gladiatorum* spread?**

The skin infection is spread by direct skin-to-skin contact. Sports that involve close contact, such as rugby and wrestling, may spread the infection from one affected athlete to another. Other names for the disease include “wrestlers herpes” or “mat pox” (after wrestling).

### **What are the symptoms of *Herpes gladiatorum*?**

Generally, symptoms usually begin within about 8 days after exposure to an infected person. Symptoms include fever, swollen glands, a tingling feeling at an affected area, and a cluster or clusters of clear, fluid-filled blisters that are typically surrounded by red skin. The blisters may or may not be painful.

### **How is *Herpes gladiatorum* diagnosed?**

Healthcare practitioners can diagnose *Herpes gladiatorum* by looking at the sores and taking a sample of the sore for testing in a lab. However, some cases of herpes can be more difficult to diagnose. Blood tests that look for antibodies can help to detect a herpes infection in people without symptoms or if there atypical lesions.

### **How long is someone with *Herpes gladiatorum* infectious to others?**

Someone with a *Herpes gladiatorum* skin lesion is generally infectious during the time when the blisters are not dry and healed. However, people with no visible sores may also be contagious.

### **What are the long-term effects of *Herpes gladiatorum*?**

Once infected with the virus, a person is infected for life. People with *Herpes gladiatorum* can go long periods of time during which the virus is inactive and cannot be spread to others. However, the virus can reactivate at any time and be transmitted to others, even if there are no symptoms. This is why prevention is so important.

### **What can I do to prevent getting *Herpes gladiatorum*?**

Good personal hygiene is essential for preventing the spread of *Herpes gladiatorum* and other skin infections. This is especially important for athletes who participate in direct contact sports. Athletes should shower immediately after practice and use their own soap, towels, and razors. Towels should be washed after each use with hot water and detergent with bleach then dried on high heat. Practice and competition gear should be cleaned after each use. Athletes should be encouraged to wash their hands often, and discouraged from picking or squeezing skin sores because what drains may be very infectious. Athletes should report any suspicious skin lesions to their coach or athletic trainer immediately. Cleaning and disinfecting the sports environment (e.g., mats) is also important in preventing infections.

**Is there any treatment for *Herpes gladiatorum*?**

There are some treatments for *Herpes gladiatorum*. Depending on the severity of the illness, a physician may prescribe some antiviral medication to speed up recovery. There are some mild herpes cases that may not require any treatment at all.

**For specific concerns about *Herpes gladiatorum*, call the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, Bureau of Infectious Disease Control at 603-271-4496 or 800-852-3345 x4496. For further information, refer to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).**