Is herpes transmitted by skin to skin contact?

January 3, 2020
By Rich Mancuso

According to many websites, they clearly state that herpes is transmitted through skin to skin contact. While this is an accurate description of how many can become infected with herpes simplex, it's quite simplistic. This statement leaves out a great deal of information about the diabolical genius of this six million-year-old virus and its sneaky behavior.

It's only skin deep.

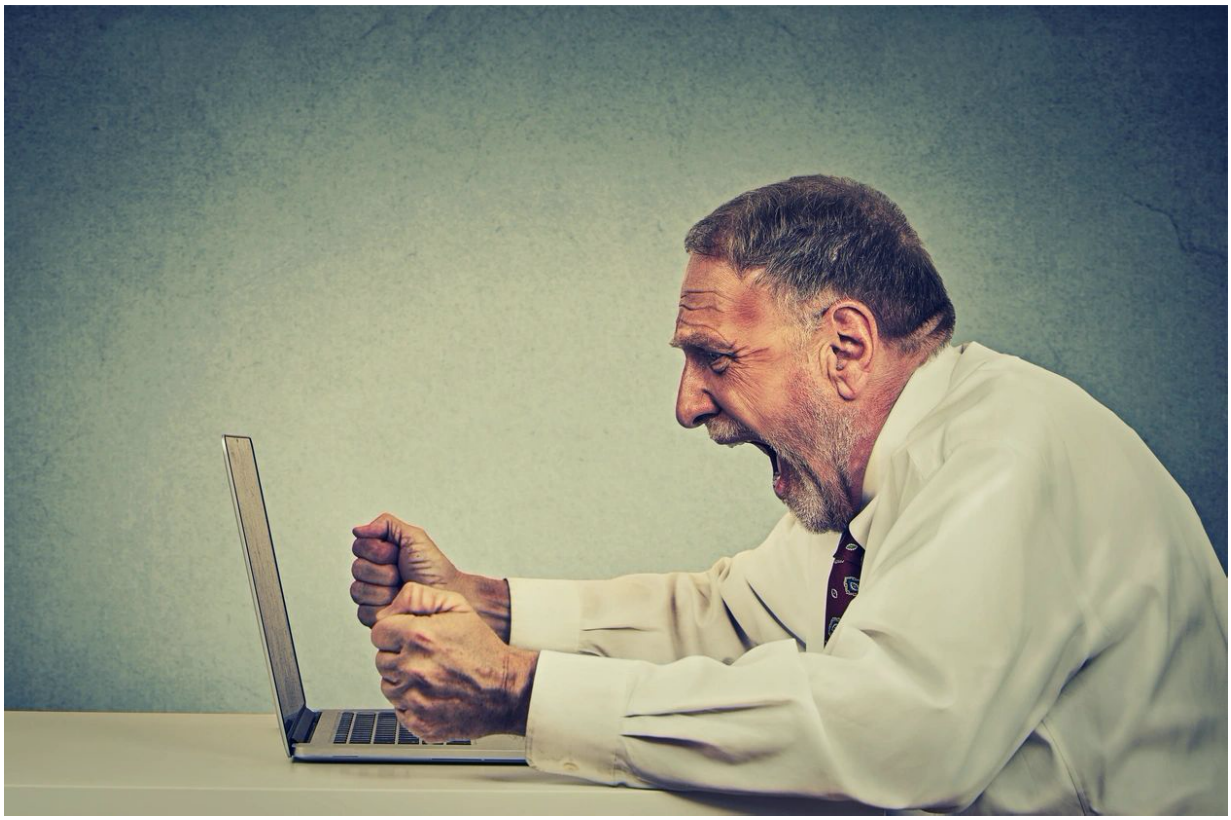
Outside of the body, the herpes virus is quite unstable and quickly loses infectivity in an environment that is not a human (as some research papers demonstrate). Some papers indeed show that the live herpes virus can survive more than 30 minutes and up to a few hours on surfaces; however, this does not mean the virus is strong enough to infect. Correlation does not guarantee causation. It's complicated.{1}

Herpes, like many other viruses on the planet, has an intrinsic biological need to survive. But herpes on its own, like a virus sitting on a surface all by itself, might as well be a simple dust particle. This is because it needs a cell to survive, an

epithelial cell to be exact. It cannot infect or reproduce without it. The outer layer of the skin does not have live epithelial cells, so basically the virus can sit quietly on the outer layer of your skin until it gets washed away or dies (after an hour or so). Without finding an epithelial cell, it's a goner.

- *"In terms of biology, you have to remember that the upper layers of your skin are all DEAD, so there is no support for a herpes virus infection there; entry of the virus into those cells would result in nothing because those cells cannot support replication. However, if you go lower, to the actual dermis (not the epidermis), there are live cells that can support herpes growth. But unless you have a real cut/scrape/sore that's visible, you'd never know when a microscopic "hole" in the epidermis occurred to permit a herpes infection into the live cell area." - Barry Margulies, Ph.D*

It's Moist



OK, so it's pretty evident that skin to skin transmission is a bit more difficult for the virus to make its new home in us, but what about other parts of our body? Great question. So let's talk about mucosal epithelium. A basic description of this would be warm, wet, and moist areas such as the mouth, vagina, anus, etc. (the reddish-pink areas you see). Don't you just love the word ***MOIST***.

- Definition: A mucous membrane, also known as a mucosa (plural: mucosae), is a layer of cells that surrounds body organs and body orifices. It is made from ectodermal tissue. Mucous membranes can contain or secrete mucus, which is a thick fluid that protects the inside of the body from dirt and

> pathogens such as viruses and bacteria. Many different mucous membranes exist, such as mucous membranes in the respiratory system, digestive system, and reproductive system. Source

So using the previous example of the virus being present on the skin—let's say the herpes virus is on a person's hands or on the male genitalia, and it comes into contact with a mouth, a vagina, an anus, etc. What do you think the chances are of passing on the virus to these new areas? Well, it's a good guess that the virus can or will be passed on this way and have very little issue finding the cells that it needs to reproduce, to create an infection, and continue its life as a reoccurring disease. Moist mucus membranes anyone? Lovely right?
It should be evident that the subject of ***skin to skin*** is barely skimming the top layer of the story and it leaves out a great deal of information with regards to asymptomatic shedding or the risk of passing on the virus.
The idiom of "skin to skin" is just a simple way to describe the possibilities or ways of transmission. But I guess it really is true when people say. . . it's only skin deep.

References
{1]
Survival of Herpes Simplex Virus Type 1 on Some Frequently Touched Objects in the Home and Public Buildings
Survival of Herpes Simplex Virus Type 1 on Some Frequently Touched Objects in the Home and Public Buildings
Decreasing Herpes Simplex Viral Infectivity in Solution
Survival of Herpes Simplex Virus Type 1 in Saliva and Tap Water Contaminating Some Common Objects
Hand-to-hand Transmission of Herpes Simplex Virus Type 1
How long do nosocomial pathogens persist on inanimate surfaces

"How did you get herpes? It's really quite simple. You're a human being and you're alive. Welcome to the planet."

Author Richard Mancuso is not a doctor, a scientist or a medical professional. Articles created by Askingforafriend.us are for informational and entertainment purposes only. Scientific information and references found within these pages are provided to corroborate factual information that is relevant to the topic being discussed. The opinions expressed in these articles and this blog should not be used to diagnose, treat, or prevent any medical ailments or diseases. For medical questions or advice, always seek proper health care by a licensed physician or a licensed medical professional. Website inks provided may change without notice at the website owner's discretion.