

Herpes on the rise in Australia

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One in eight Australian adults has been infected with the virus causing genital herpes, with the rate one in five for women aged 35-44, a study said.

The first Australian study of herpes simplex virus infection -- published in the British journal "Sexually Transmitted Infections" -- also found 76 percent of Australian adults were exposed to the other main variant, HSV-1, which causes cold sores on the mouth and lips, The Australian reported Friday.

Genital infections, or HSV-2, were more than twice as common among women as men -- 16 percent to 8 percent, the study found.

The study was funded by drug giant GlaxoSmithKline, which is developing a vaccine for HSV-2.

Lead author Tony Cunningham, deputy chairman of the Australian Herpes Management Forum, said the findings were significant as HSV-2 trebled the chance of contracting HIV.

Cunningham said it was suspected but still unproven that a greater incidence of oral sex among adolescents was increasing the HSV-1 infection rate. Contrary to popular belief, this variant could infect the genital area, he said.

He also warned against oral sex for women in late pregnancy, as HSV-1 could be passed to the baby, with serious or fatal consequences in 25

percent of neonatal infections.

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