

FROM:

EMAIL ME :

The Oprah Winfrey Show
Attn: Show Producer Gina S.
PO Box 909715
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USA

Dear Gina,

As April is National STD Month, I would like Oprah to do a segment on herpes.

At the moment, **more than 1 in 4 Americans carry genital herpes**, but only 1 in 10 people notice any symptoms.

The American Sexual Health Association forecast that **50% of all Americans will carry genital herpes by 2025**.

I believe a single show on this hidden epidemic could change the way millions of people think about this issue. I think it would also be a powerful way to dramatically increase the public "call to action" for a cure or vaccine for this common virus.

More than 67% of Americans carry oral herpes, and again, few of them know it. It is an unlucky few who are symptomatic, and carry the emotional burden of this very common condition.

Sexual health clinics do not screen for herpes. It is too widespread.

As a producer of the Oprah Show, you are uniquely positioned to radically change the way America thinks about what is essentially a common skin condition. Please do what you can to educate Oprah viewers about the heavily stigmatized, incredibly common, but largely invisible herpes epidemic. You could change the lives of millions of carriers.

I have enclosed more information for you to take a look at.

Thank you for considering this show topic,

The hidden epidemic

Think about a friend, relative or significant other telling you about their experience of having chickenpox or mono as a kid. Or how they have finally gotten over that fever blister which has been annoying them the last couple of weeks. Now think of the same person telling you they have genital herpes (HSV-2). Did that last statement cause you to have a different reaction? It shouldn't – because ALL of these common skin conditions are simply different manifestations of the herpes virus. Herpes viruses are a leading cause of human viral disease, second only to influenza and cold viruses.¹

However, the negative stigma surrounding some types of herpes is so prevalent and powerful that it often causes the millions of HSV-positive Americans who know they have it to experience feelings of depression, despair, fear, anger and even contemplation of suicide. The judgments, rejection and psychological burden that many experience because of this virus are often far worse and insidious than the physical manifestations.

Here are some useful statistics regarding herpes simplex virus (HSV) Types I and II (the strains commonly associated with STDs) that the public should know:

- **Between 50 to 80% of Americans have HSV-1**, the strain commonly responsible for oral herpes (aka cold sores or fever blisters). Most people contract oral herpes when they are children by receiving a kiss from a friend or relative.²
- HSV-1 can be “converted” from oral herpes in one person to genital herpes in another via oral sex.³
- 20-25% of people have HSV-2 (the strain most commonly associated with genital herpes, or GH) – although as many as 90% don't know it, because they have no symptoms. Some sources say that as many as 1 in 3 people over the age of 30 are carriers of HSV-2. It is estimated that 50% of Americans will carry genital herpes by 2025.⁴
- **Women are five times more likely to get HSV than men.**⁵
- HSV is transmitted through direct skin-to-skin contact. This occurs when a contagious area comes into contact with a tiny break in the skin or mucous membrane tissue, primarily the mouth and genitals.⁶
- **Herpes can be actively transmitted by herpes carriers with no symptoms** to others via a process known as asymptomatic or subclinical viral shedding.⁷
- HSV can be transferred to the eyes (herpes keratitis), causing inflammation and scarring of the cornea. Ocular herpes is the leading cause of infectious blind-

¹ University of South Carolina School of Medicine (<http://pathmicro.med.sc.edu/virol/herpes.htm>)

² American Social Health Association (http://www.ashastd.org/herpes/herpes_learn_questions.cfm)

³ American Social Health Association (http://www.ashastd.org/herpes/herpes_learn_questions.cfm)

⁴ Herpes Online (http://www.herpeseonline.org/articles/herpes_statistics.html), American Social Health Association (http://www.ashastd.org/herpes/herpes_learn_questions.cfm)

⁵ American Social Health Association (http://www.ashastd.org/pdfs/Herpes_factsheet.pdf)

⁶ American Social Health Association (http://www.ashastd.org/herpes/herpes_learn_questions.cfm)

⁷ HerpesOnline.org (<http://www.herpeseonline.org/hsv1vs2.html>), The Center for Disease Control (<http://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment/2006/genital-ulcers.htm#genulc3>)

ness in the United States, currently affecting 400,000 Americans. There are close to 50,000 new and recurring cases occurring each year.⁸

- HSV can also be transferred to the hand (herpes whitlow, aka “hand herpes”) or other parts of the body (herpes gladiatorum, aka “mat herpes” or “scrum pox”) via contact between an active herpes outbreak and a cut/abrasion area on the skin.⁹
- HSV can cause severe, potentially fatal, issues for infants (neonatal herpes) that are vaginally delivered by mothers who have recently acquired HSV or suffer an HSV outbreak at the time of delivery.¹⁰
- Genital HSV-1 and 2 can be transferred through “outercourse” (skin-to-skin contact in the genital region) as well as intercourse and oral sex.¹¹ If a person thinks they can’t get genital herpes without “technically” having sex, think again!
- **Condom use reduces transmission rates by only 50%** --> using condoms does NOT offer 100% protection from contracting herpes. For example, if the location of the virus on the skin is not protected by a condom (i.e., the testicles), then HSV can be transmitted even if condoms are used.¹²
- **HERPES TESTING IS *NOT* INCLUDED IN A "FULL" STD SCREEN, UNLESS SPECIFICALLY REQUESTED.**¹³ Thus, many people think they've been tested for it, when in fact they haven't – and so may innocently tell their partner they are “STD-free”, when in fact they are not.
- As a consequence of all of the above, “asymptomatic carriers” can unknowingly transfer the virus to others, making it one of the most communicable (and, for now, permanent) STDs. Approximately 70% of the estimated 1 million new cases of genital herpes each year are contracted in this way.¹⁴
- There is currently no cure for the herpes virus. The commercially-available suppressive treatments simply help reduce the severity/length of the outbreaks that some herpes carriers suffer. While these treatments are also useful in reducing viral shedding, they do NOT completely prevent the potential for herpes transmission.¹⁵
- Having HSV can compromise the immunity system: people with HSV are two to four times as likely to contract HIV than a person without the virus in their system.¹⁶ Think of the impact an HSV cure/vaccine would have in areas ravaged by AIDS/HIV!

⁸ All About Vision (<http://www.allaboutvision.com/conditions/ocular-herpes.htm>), Science Daily (<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2006/09/060925091405.htm>)

⁹ Visual Dx Health (<http://www.visualdxhealth.com/adult/herpeticWhitlow.htm>), University of South Carolina School of Medicine (<http://pathmicro.med.sc.edu/virol/herpes.htm>)

¹⁰ American Association of Family Physicians (<http://www.aafp.org/afp/20020315/1138.html>)

¹¹ Planned Parenthood (<http://www.plannedparenthood.org/health-topics/birth-control/outercourse-4371.htm>), The Mayo Clinic (<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/herpes-symptoms/MY00429>)

¹² Journal of the American Medical Association (<http://jama.ama-assn.org/cgi/reprint/286/17/2095.pdf>), HerpesDiagnosis.com (<http://www.herpesdiagnosis.com/transmit.html>)

¹³ Herpes Online (http://www.herpesonline.org/herpes_testing.html)

¹⁴ Best Herpes Treatments (<http://www.best-herpes-treatments.com/herpes-statistics.html>), The Mayo Clinic (<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/herpes-symptoms/MY00429>), Medical College of Wisconsin (<http://healthlink.mcw.edu/article/933130732.html>)

¹⁵ American Social Health Association (http://www.ashastd.org/herpes/herpes_learn_questions.cfm)

¹⁶ Journal of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndromes (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15021308>)

Given these statistics, it seems **the only practical solution to the epidemic is new treatments**. I believe a frank discussion incorporating any of these statistics could create a groundswell of activity regarding herpes. To constructively harness that interest, I suggest the following approach.

Oprah could give her viewers "Actions 1-2-3 against HSV":

1. Get tested. Make it a routine practice to request a HerpeSelect test (or one of the other tests recommended at http://www.ashastd.org/pdfs/blood_test.pdf) when you go for your annual physical exam. Blood tests can also be done anonymously, using a service like www.requestatest.com.
2. Educate yourself about herpes. Read the [ASHA fact sheet](http://www.ashastd.org)¹⁷ and check out the other resources at www.ashastd.org -- to protect yourself, as well as to spread compassion to the millions of people who currently have HSV.
3. Donate to worthwhile university research programs that are actively working on new treatments that might lead to a vaccine (or even a cure!) at www.curehsv.com.

Other ideas for a GH segment on Oprah:

Introduce the segment as a follow-up to the STD article in the August 2008 issue of the O Magazine http://www.oprah.com/article/omagazine/200808_omag_herpes.

Offer show passes to HSV-positive people (people who have had chicken pox, shingles, GH, ocular herpes or even a cold sore) who would be willing to come forward and participate. Oprah could ask, "how many of you have some strain of the herpes virus?" – and all would raise their hand. A very strong visual impact!

Have a team from a reputable lab (Quest?) on location to offer the audience free HSV testing before the show using the BioKit (www.biokitusa.com) rapid blood test method. At the end of the show, report the group outcome (i.e., 14% were HSV-2 positive, 82% were HSV-1 positive, etc. – audience members could elect whether or not they want their individual test results after the show taping). It would also be interesting to note what percentage of the audience declined the complimentary test, and why.

Have an HSV expert on the show to talk with Oprah; here are some people who are considered well-respected professionals on this topic:

- Terri Warren, RN, ANP, is the owner of Westover Heights Clinic (www.westoverheights.com) in Portland, Ore., a private clinic specializing in the diagnosis and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases. Warren has been in practice for over 20 years. Her area of expertise is herpes simplex. She is the online advisor of the WebMD herpes message board.
- Dr. David Bloom, a virologist at the University of Florida College of Medicine (<http://www.med.ufl.edu>), who is doing research on a new treatment possibility. Members of the Herpes-Coldsores.com online community just led a successful grassroots effort to raise \$2,000 to establish a foundation at UF to support Dr. Bloom's research (see how it happened at <http://www.herpes-coldsores.com/messageforum/showthread.php?t=14179>).
- Dr. Lawrence Corey serves as the joint head of Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center Clinical Research Division's Program in Infectious Diseases (www.fhcrc.org) and the Virology Division of the University of Washington's Department of Laboratory Medicine. Dr. Corey specializes in herpesvirus, HIV and other infectious disease-related research.

¹⁷ ASHA HSV Fact Sheet (http://www.ashastd.org/pdfs/Herpes_factsheet.pdf)