

# How does herpes testing work?

## It Takes More than a Look!

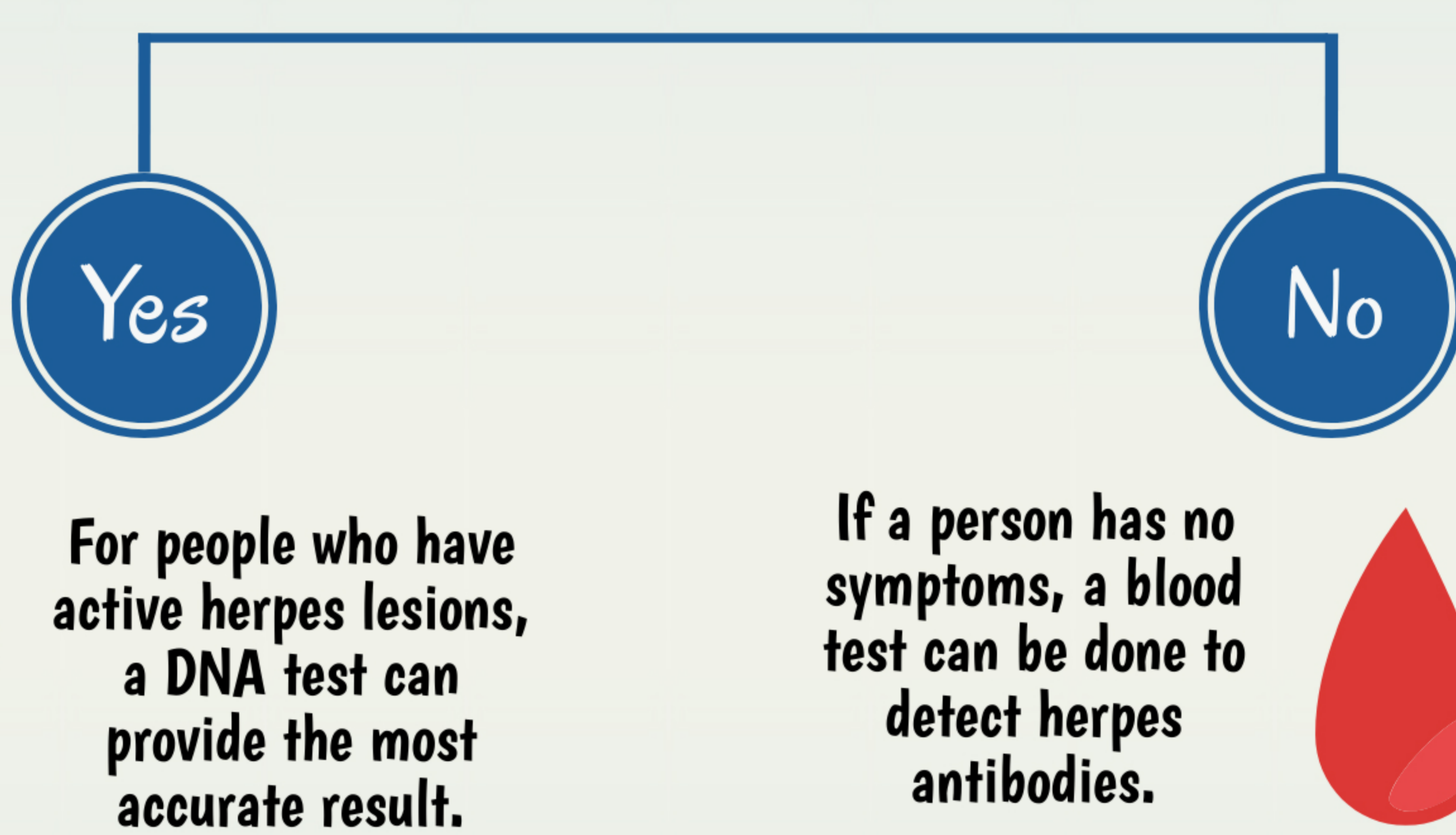
Is that sore or rash actually genital herpes? Do you need a test or can you tell by just looking? Can a healthcare provider? No! When it comes to diagnosing genital herpes, it takes more than a look.



A visual exam is never enough. For an accurate diagnosis, it's important to get tested.

Herpes testing options can be confusing. In order to get an accurate diagnosis, it's important to get the right test for your situation.

## Are you experiencing any symptoms of genital herpes right now?



DNA tests—known as Nucleic Acid Amplification Testing (NAAT) are fast, accurate, and can tell if a person has HSV-1 or HSV-2. There is less chance of a false negative result with NAATs. NAAT methods are the preferred method, with PCR as the most-widely used NAAT method. Another type of test—viral culture—also tests a sample from a lesion, but has a higher rate of false negatives than DNA tests.

A type-specific IgG test can distinguish between HSV-1 and HSV-2 antibodies, which are present in the blood in people with herpes. A positive antibody test to HSV-2 would suggest genital herpes infection (since oral HSV-2 infection is rare). HSV-1 antibodies are difficult to interpret, since about half of all adults have an oral HSV-1 infection.



## What do my test results mean?

VIRAL CULTURE OR DNA

**POSITIVE**

While viral culture does have a high rate of false negatives, if you test positive you can be sure you have the virus. HSV DNA tests are highly accurate and a positive result indicates a herpes infection is present.

VIRAL CULTURE OR DNA

**NEGATIVE**

Viral culture is much more reliable during a first-time infection, because the amount of virus present is much higher. Even in an initial outbreak, though, a negative culture does not mean that you absolutely do not have a herpes infection. There is less chance of a false negative result with HSV DNA tests.

TYPE-SPECIFIC BLOOD TEST

**POSITIVE**

A positive blood test means that herpes antibodies are present and thus confirm herpes infection—even if a person has never had any noticeable symptoms. As many as 90 percent of people with herpes don't realize they have the infection.

TYPE-SPECIFIC BLOOD TEST

**NEGATIVE**

While it is possible for a blood test to miss an infection, a negative test typically means a person is not infected—as long as the test is not done too early. By three weeks, about half of infected individuals will have detectable antibodies. By six weeks, about 70% will and by six months, antibodies will be detectable in all infected people.

## UNDERSTANDING BLOOD TEST VALUES

The number result—referred to as the index value—is often clearly positive or clearly negative (see right). But numbers in the middle range are difficult to interpret, as false positives and false negatives can occur in this range.

If a “low positive” index value is encountered, testing can be repeated with another method, including the Western Blot, Biokit Rapid assay, and the Focus recombinant inhibition HSV-2 ELISA.

### INDEX VALUES

An index value less than 1.1 should be considered negative

An index value above 3.5 should be considered positive.