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Conflict of interest: none declared

Self-test questions

The following statements are either true or false (answers on page 27)

1. A negative viral culture for herpes simplex does not exclude infection.
2. Up to 80% of women infected with chlamydia are asymptomatic.

Dental notes

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Testing for sexually transmitted infections

Dentists may not realise that there is an increase in the proportion of cases of genital herpes that are caused by herpes simplex virus type 1. In developed countries there is an increase in the proportion of adults who have not been exposed to herpes simplex virus type 1 during childhood but who contract it genitally in adulthood. The recurrence rate of genital herpes due to type 1 is apparently less frequent than with type 2. Conversely, there are several reports of primary herpetic gingivostomatitis and up to 4% of recurrent herpes labialis being caused by herpes simplex virus type 2. Dentists treating these patients should be aware of this developing

trend and the availability of laboratory tests to aid them in their diagnosis.

Tests for sexually transmitted diseases have shortcomings such as the window period required before the test becomes positive. This is particularly important for dentists or their staff who sustain a needle-stick injury.

Further reading

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