

An intriguing genital eruption in a traveler returning from Philippines

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Clinical Image Description

A 35-year-old otherwise healthy man complained of a 4-day history of genital lesions which had appeared immediately after returning from a trip to Philippines during which he reported having had protected sex with multiple partners. The physical examination revealed the presence of multiple grouped erythematous ulcerative papules in the pubic region and at the base of the penis, with sparing of the areas covered by the condom (Figure 1). The lesions were completely asymptomatic. There was neither lymphadenopathy, fever nor dysuria. There was also no involvement of the oral mucosa. Given the asymptomaticity of the lesions, our initial hypothesis was multiple syphilitic chancres, but the patient's serologies resulted negative for syphilis and for HIV virus. PCR testing of an ulcerative lesion revealed the presence of HSV-2, allowing the diagnosis of genital herpes. Therapy with oral aciclovir 400 mg 3 times a day was initiated, with slow but progressive resolution of the clinical picture in three weeks.

Genital herpes is one of the most common sexually transmitted disease worldwide, with an estimated 400 million individuals affected. It includes a wide spectrum of clinical manifestations, from the classic painful grouped vesicular rash associated with local adenitis to rare asymptomatic eruptions, such as the case described. Atypical presentation may include papular, nodular or ulcerative lesions. The gold standard for diagnosis is HSV DNA detection, while differential diagnosis includes other sexually transmitted infections (syphilis, chancroid, inguinal granuloma) as well as other causes (candidiasis, Bechet disease, fixed drug eruption, sexual trauma, herpes zoster, contact dermatitis). Prompt recognition and early treatment is crucial to reduce the severity and duration of symptoms, to prevent transmission and to avoid complications - including urinary retention, aseptic meningitis, or severe systemic illness.



Figure 1: Clinical image of multiple erythematous and ulcerative papules in the pubic region and at the base of the penis.

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