You summarize the evidence for your patient. Infection with HSV is common, affecting an estimated 10% of adults in Canada.\(^1\) When there is co-infection of HSV and HIV, there is a doubly negative effect. Genital HSV reactivation has been shown to increase HIV viral load, risk of HIV transmission, and disease progression.\(^2,3\) Co-infection of HSV and HIV has also been shown to increase HSV viral shedding, risk of HSV transmission, and frequency and severity of HSV symptoms.\(^4,5\) Anyone who has multiple partners and unprotected sex is at higher risk of co-infection. Syphilis and LGV are less common but are on the rise in Canada, especially in men who have sex with men\(^6\) and those with HIV.\(^6,7\)

Suppressive therapy (acyclovir, famciclovir, or valacyclovir) is used primarily to prevent recurrence; only valacyclovir has been proven to reduce risk of HSV transmission in immunocompetent people. The effect on HSV transmission in those with HIV is unclear. A recent systematic review examined whether suppressive antiviral therapy for HSV in those co-infected with HIV prevents HSV transmission.\(^8\) Most studies used surrogate markers, such as HSV detection and viral load. The only study that directly measured transmission of HSV found no protective effect from treatment (9% transmission rate with acyclovir vs 6% with placebo). Results of this trial await confirmation. Although there was preliminary evidence that valacyclovir reduces HSV detection and viral load in those with HIV who had never taken antiretroviral therapy, this effect was not found in those currently taking antiretroviral therapy.\(^8\)

Management
You summarize the evidence for your patient. Infection with HSV is associated with increased HIV viral load and risk of HIV transmission. Suppressive therapy has not been shown to reduce risk of HSV transmission, but can help decrease recurrence. Although viral shedding can occur even when asymptomatic, risk of HSV transmission is highest when there are symptoms. You question him and find out that since he learned his viral load was undetectable he has been having unprotected sex. You discuss the need to use condoms to reduce the risk of HSV transmission and recommend he notify all sexual partners in the previous 60 days. Supportive counseling will be important and you arrange to see him after the laboratory results come in. You make a note to call public health if the diagnosis is confirmed. Syphilis and LGV are notifiable diseases; genital HSV infection is notifiable in some provinces.\(^9\)

References

La traduction en français de cet article se trouve à www.cfp.ca dans la table des matières du numéro de février 2016 à la page e78.