

Herpes Simplex-1 (HSV-1)

What is a cold sore?

A cold sore is a skin infection. It normally starts as a group of blisters. When the blisters break open, they leave open sores that form scabs. Most often they show up on the lips, face, mouth and throat. They may be tender, numb, tingly or cause a burning feeling.



What causes a cold sore?

A cold sore is caused by Herpes Simplex-1 virus.

- The virus is spread by direct contact with open sores or by fluids that contain the virus, such as saliva. An infection will start in 2 to 12 days after the virus enters the skin or mouth.
- The first time a person is infected, they may also have a fever, muscle pain, and be crabby and tired.
- When the infection is over, the virus does not go away. It hides in the nerve root. It may become active again later and cause new sores. These outbreaks may be set off by skin trauma, stress, sunlight, fever, tiredness (fatigue) and menses (periods).
- Your child may have a “tingling” feeling before the new sores appear. It may be possible to prevent an outbreak if a special medicine is given as soon as the tingling is first felt. Talk to your child’s doctor or nurse about preventive medicine.

How are cold sores diagnosed?

Cold sores are usually diagnosed by how they look and the symptoms. Your child’s health care provider may take a sample of the sore and send it to the lab for testing.

How are cold sores treated?

There is no cure for cold sores. You may treat the sores if they hurt. Most often they heal on their own in 7 to 14 days. The following treatments may help reduce your child’s pain.

Talk to your child’s doctor or nurse about this treatment. You will need to find out how much Benadryl® to use and if it is ok for your child to swallow the liquid:

- If sores in the mouth hurt, have your child rinse their mouth with a 1-to-1 mix of Benadryl® and liquid antacid such as Mylanta™ or Maalox™. This can be done up to 4 times each day. The mix will coat the sores and help reduce pain. After rinsing, your child can spit out the liquid. It may be ok to swallow the liquid, especially if your child has any sores in their throat. If swallowed, the Benadryl may make your child sleepy. You can buy liquid Benadryl® at a pharmacy.

Treatment continued

- Put baby teething gel or liquid on the sores up to 4 times daily, if needed. This will numb the sores before your child eats or brushes their teeth.
- If your child's sores are very painful, acetaminophen (Tylenol®) may be used. Talk to your child's doctor or nurse to find out how much to give.
- Eating something frozen (such as Popsicles® or juice bars) or drinking ice water may help.
- For sores on the lip:
 - Put ice on to reduce swelling.
 - Use Blistex® to prevent drying and reduce pain.
 - Use a lip product that contains sunscreen before going outside.
 - When using a lip product such as Blistex®, do not let anyone else use the same tube that your child is using. Throw away the product when your child's cold sores are healed. This will help keep from spreading the virus.

ALERT: Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any questions or concerns or if your child has:

- Any signs of dehydration:
 - Dry mouth.
 - Less or no tears when crying.
 - No urine for 8 to 12 hours.
- Many sores or refuses to eat or drink because the sores are very painful.
- Sores that look more infected. This includes more redness, warmth and/or pus.
- Sores that last more than 14 days.
- Special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

This sheet was created to help you care for your child or family member. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment and follow-up.