

Cold sores and gingivostomatitis

What are cold sores?

Cold sores are one or several painful 1 to 3 millimetre sores on the outer lip caused by a herpes virus infection. They start as small lumps, then become blisters, which break and then crust over. They are usually only on one part of the mouth. Just before a cold sore develops, your child may feel a tingling or burning on the outer lip at the same place where they had cold sores before.

What is gingivostomatitis?

Sometimes when young children are first infected they can have a more severe illness than just cold sores. The illness usually begins with a high fever before the first mouth sores appear. Sores may form on the lips and inside the mouth on gums, tongue and cheeks. Often the gums are very red and bleed easily. Children will have difficulty eating and drinking.

What is the cause?

Cold sores and gingivostomatitis are most commonly caused by a type of herpes virus called herpes simplex virus type 1 (HSV1). This is a different kind of herpes virus to the kind that is sexually transmitted.

Infection happens when your child has had contact with someone with cold sores. The infection is passed from person to person through contact with saliva that contains the virus (such as on a drinking glass, or by kissing).

How long do they last?

The blisters will burst, scab over, and dry up. The whole process takes 10 to 14 days. The sores do not cause scars. Treatment may shorten the course by many days.

How can I take care of my child?

Pain relief

For mouth ulcers anaesthetic mouth paint (such as chlorhexidine and lignocaine or Bonjela) can help ease the pain so your child can drink and eat. Pain relievers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen are also useful. Give them regularly (every 6 hours for paracetamol or every 8 hours for inbuprofen) rather than waiting until your child's pain becomes severe.

Encourage drinks

You can help prevent dehydration by giving your child plenty of drinks. Your child may manage fluids such as chicken broth, or iceblocks.

If the sores prevent your child from drinking he may become dehydrated. You will know your child is dehydrated if he does not pass urine very often, has a dry mouth and is sleepy and lethargic.

Try and prevent the virus spreading to other parts of his body and to others

Try to keep your child's hand away from his mouth while he has active sores. Tell your child not to rub his eyes.

The infection can spread to others by kissing so stop the child from kissing others – particularly babies and young children (most older children and adults will already have had a herpes infection and will not catch it again).

If your child is young and puts everything in his mouth, avoid sharing toys with other children for a week while there are sores. Your child should be kept out of childcare until the fevers have settled and the sores have stopped weeping.



Oral medicine

If your child has never had the infection before and has had sores for less than 3 days, a medicine called aciclovir may help the sores go away more quickly. This may also be prescribed if the sores are spreading to other parts of the body.

Your child's medicine is

Give _____mg (_____tablets/ml)

_____ times a day for _____ days.

Antiviral eye drops

An infection on the eye can be serious so care has to be taken to try to prevent spread to the child's eye or the eye of another person. Make sure hands are washed often and try to stop the child from picking the sores.

If your child is very young and has a high risk of infecting his eyes, or has any blisters near the eyes this treatment may be prescribed.

Your child's medicine is

Give _____drops _____times a

day for _____days

For more information

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How can cold sores be prevented?

Once the child has had an infection with herpes virus the virus can live on in the body and some children get more cold sores later. An outbreak may be triggered by exposure to intense sunlight. Using a lip balm containing sunscreen may help prevent a new outbreak.

If blisters are not yet present, apply an ice cube or ice pack to the tingly area continuously for 90 minutes. This will sometimes stop an outbreak.

Once the blisters appear, you usually can't shorten the time that you have them.

If you start applying an anti-herpes lip cream (eg Aciclovir) as soon as any small bumps appear, before blisters form, it may help. These creams can be obtained at the chemist over the counter. If you don't have an anti-herpes cream, covering the blisters with petroleum jelly can reduce the pain and help with healing.

When should a child see a doctor?

- There are any sores near the eye.
- If you think your child is getting dehydrated.
- The sores last longer than 2 weeks.
- You have questions about anti-herpes creams.
- If your child is getting cold sores frequently
- You have other concerns or questions.



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