

Cold Sore

“Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.”

A cold sore, also known as a fever blister, appears as one or more red blisters on the lip. It is caused by the Herpes Simplex type I virus. This is not the same as a canker sore, which is found inside the mouth. While canker sores are not contagious, cold sores **are**. Cold sores usually appear on the lip, but occasionally are seen on the nostril, chin, or fingers. They are rarely found inside the mouth.

Cold sores are small, painful fluid filled blisters, which eventually burst and ooze. A yellowish crust forms, and then falls off. The entire process usually lasts 7-10 days. Just before a cold sore appears, there is a period called the prodrome. During this period, there is generally a tingling feeling on the lip, and a small hard spot will form. Within a few days, the cold sore will erupt from this spot.

Once a person develops a cold sore, the virus that caused it will never go away. It remains dormant, or “sleeping,” in the nerve cells near the original sore. Future outbreaks may be brought on by a fever, a bad cold, menses, stress, sun exposure, or for no apparent reason at all. Every case is unique. Some people will never have a second episode, and others will have cold sores for the rest of their lives. The good news is that outbreaks will be less frequent as a person ages.

Cold sores are contagious, and are spread through skin to skin contact. They can infect others from the time they appear until they are completely crusted over. The very first cold sore may not appear until up to 20 days after exposure to the Herpes Simplex type I virus. This is not to be confused with the Herpes Simplex type II virus, which causes genital herpes. As a rule, type I affects areas above the waist, and type II is found below the waist.

There is treatment for common cold sores. While there is currently no cure for Herpes Simplex, the frequency of outbreaks and their duration can be reduced. There are over the counter and prescription creams that will ease the symptoms and may shorten the time the sore lasts. Other treatments include over the counter pain relievers, while hot or cold compresses on the blister may ease the pain. Remember, these compresses will be infected with the virus, so always dispose of them after use. Never squeeze, pinch, or pick a blister, as this may cause it to spread. You must allow it to heal in its own time. See a doctor if your immune system is compromised, for instance if you have cancer, AIDS, or have had an organ transplant. If the sore does not go away in two weeks, if the symptoms are severe, or if your eyes become irritated, see a doctor immediately. A herpes infection in the eyes can lead to blindness, so be very careful not to touch your eyes when you have an active outbreak.

Follow these simple steps to prevent the spread of infection to other areas of your body, or to other people.

When blisters are present:

No close contact with infants, anyone with broken skin, or those whose immune systems are compromised

Don't kiss anyone

Don't share utensils, drinking cups, or towels

Be careful about touching other parts of your body, as the eyes are very susceptible to infection

To reduce your number of outbreaks, avoid things that can trigger a flare up, such as too much sun, too little sleep, a poor diet, and a lack of moderate exercise. Use sunscreen on the lips and face summer **and** winter.

Take control of your health!

For more information, you may want to check out:

www.mayoclinic.com

www.kidshealth.org

Blessings,
Nurse Karen