



Herpes, oral

Oral herpes infections are commonly acquired for the first time in early childhood and may reappear throughout a person's lifetime (recurrent infection).

School health and childcare provider information

Cause

Herpes simplex virus type 1 (HSV-1).

Symptoms

Primary infection causes blister-like sores inside the mouth (gingivostomatitis) and on the gums. Fever, irritability, and tender, swollen lymph nodes may also occur. Recurrent infections (cold sores, fever blisters) appear on lips and face. Some children may have the virus in their bodies, but do not develop symptoms. Herpes simplex virus can also cause infections of the eyes, fingers, and central nervous system.

Spread

By close person-to-person contact, such as through direct contact with saliva (e.g., kissing) or touching the fluid from the blisters or sores.

Incubation

It takes 2 to 14 days from the time a person is exposed for the first time until symptoms occur with an average of 4 days.

Contagious period

First occurrence (primary infection): up to 2 weeks, occasionally up to 7 weeks.

Recurrent infection: usually 3 to 4 days. The greatest concentration of virus is shed during first occurrence infections with symptoms. Recurrent infections may occur due to a variety of "triggers," such as stress, cold, or sunlight.

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Exclusion

Childcare

Primary infection: Exclude children who do not have control over their saliva (drooling) until the mouth sores are gone.

Recurrent infection (fever blisters and cold sores): none.

School

None.

Treatment

Antiviral medication and easing discomfort. This includes:

- Ice or warm wash cloth applied to blisters
- Chilled or cold foods
- Avoid acidic foods
- Pain reliever

Prevention

- Encourage children not to touch the sores. Do not kiss an infected person on or near the mouth when sores are present.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water after having contact with the sores or saliva. **Thorough handwashing is the best way to prevent the spread of communicable diseases.**
- Wear disposable medical gloves when touching the sores is necessary (e.g., when applying medication). Dispose of gloves after use.
- Do not share food or drinks with children or staff.
- Clean and sanitize mouthed toys, objects, and surfaces at least daily and when soiled.
- Cover blisters with clothing or a bandage whenever possible.

For more information, call Hennepin County Epidemiology at 612-543-5230 or call your local health department.

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