

Coldsores

Cold sores, also called fever blisters and oral herpes, are small sores that form most commonly on or near the lips. Cold sores usually follow a predictable pattern of four stages lasting about 10 to 14 days.

The first symptom is a painful, itchy tingling. A day or so later, small red blisters appear. Then, in a few days, the blisters form into oozing sores with yellowish crusts. Finally, in a week to ten days, the sores scab over and heal.

Sometimes, outbreaks are accompanied by low fever, headaches, body aches, and fatigue.



A cold sore

What causes cold sores?

Cold sores are caused by the Herpes simplex virus. It is thought that once you are infected with the Herpes simplex virus, it lives in your nervous system forever. The cold sore virus is extremely contagious. It spreads by direct contact with an infected person, or through contact with personal items, such as infected towels, toothbrushes, or razors. Symptoms appear from one to three weeks after initial exposure.

Cold sores are very common. Estimates vary, but while about 80 to 90 percent of people have been infected, only about 25 to 40 percent of those have symptoms on a regular basis. Certain triggers seem to set off outbreaks. Some of these triggers include exposure to ultraviolet light, physical and emotional stress, fatigue, hormone fluctuations, a woman's menstrual cycle, and illnesses like cold and flu.

Treating cold sores

There is no cure for cold sores, but you can ease the pain by applying over-the-counter remedies that contain numbing agents, like benzocaine or phenol, washing the infected area gently with water and an antiseptic soap, applying either a warm compress or ice, or avoiding spicy or acidic foods during an outbreak.

If this is the first time you've had cold sores, or if fever, swollen glands, or bleeding gums accompany your cold sores, let us know right away, so



Towels can carry the virus

we can zero in on the correct diagnosis. In some cases, we may prescribe an anti-viral medication.

Preventing the spread of cold sores

Cold sores are very contagious. You can work to prevent cold sores from spreading by:

- Not touching the area
- Washing thoroughly with water and an antiseptic soap if you have touched the sore
- Not kissing anyone while symptoms persist
- Not touching anyone if you have just touched your sore
- Being extremely careful to prevent the spread of the infection to the eye, as blindness can result

Cold sores are painful and annoying, but take heart. They do go away on their own, and you'll soon be pain-free again.