

FACTS ABOUT COLD SORES

What is herpes simplex virus?

Herpes simplex virus (HSV) type 1 causes infections of the mouth, nose, and lips, also known as cold sores or fever blisters. Children often become infected with this virus in early childhood and many have no symptoms. Herpes simplex virus type 2 is most commonly associated with genital herpes. Once a person is infected with either of these viruses, it stays in the nerve cells for life, occasionally causing symptoms.

What are the symptoms of HSV infection?

Sometimes a person can be infected with HSV and have no symptoms. When symptoms do occur, they may include fever, runny nose, and painful, red sores that eventually turn to blisters, ooze, and then crust over. The symptoms can last from 7 to 10 days.

How is HSV spread?

The virus is spread through direct contact with the drainage from the sores or saliva of the infected person.

Who is at risk from HSV?

Many healthy people become infected with HSV without major problems. People with HIV or a weakened immune system suffer more complications from HSV.

How is HSV diagnosed?

Cold sores are usually diagnosed by a clinical exam. Cultures can identify the virus and blood tests can detect the presence of antibodies to the virus.

How is HSV treated?

There are antiviral medications used to shorten the period of symptoms. Not all are licensed for use with children.

How can HSV be prevented?

1. Avoid sharing cups, toothbrushes, eating utensils, or toys that go in the mouth. Remove mouthed toys promptly from the children's play area until they can be cleaned and sanitized. If the infected child puts toys in the mouth, take steps to ensure these toys are not shared with others until they have been cleaned and sanitized.
2. Practice good handwashing.

Exclude from group setting?

In a child care or school, most children with cold sores do not need to be excluded unless the child drools or bites. The cold sores of a child with diagnosed HSV infection should be covered whenever possible with a bandage, clothing, or other dressing.

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