

# Cold Sores

Cold sores, also called fever blisters or oral herpes, are small sores that form most commonly on or near the lips.

Cold sores usually follow a predictable pattern of four stages that lasts 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 10 days, the sores scab over and heal.

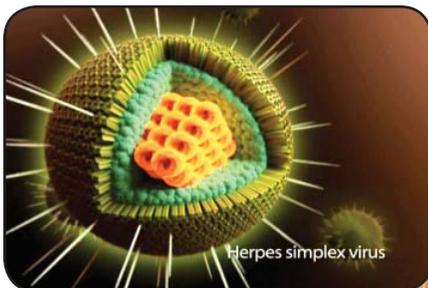
Outbreaks can be accompanied by low fever, headaches, body aches, and fatigue.

Cold sores are painful and annoying, but be patient. They do go away on their own, and you will soon be pain-free again.

## The cause of cold sores

Cold sores are caused by the herpes simplex virus. Symptoms appear from 1 to 3 weeks after initial exposure. Once you are infected with the virus, it lives in your nervous system forever.

Certain triggers seem to set off outbreaks. Some of these triggers include exposure to ultraviolet light, physical and emotional stress, fatigue, hormone fluctuations, the menstrual cycle, and illnesses like fever, cold, or flu.



*Herpes simplex virus*

*Wash thoroughly*



*Cold sore on lower lip*

## Diagnosis and treatment

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, and avoiding spicy or acidic foods during an outbreak.

If this is the first time you have had a cold sore, or if fever, swollen glands, or bleeding gums accompany your cold sore, let us know right away, so we can determine the correct diagnosis. In some cases, we may prescribe an anti-viral medication.

## Preventing the spread of cold sores

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. You can help 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 touching anyone if you have just touched your sore.
- ❖ not kissing anyone while symptoms persist.
- ❖ being extremely careful to prevent the spread of the infection to the eye, as blindness can result.