

Cold Sores

Date:

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your child may have been exposed to **cold sores** while at child care.

What causes cold sores?

Cold sores (also called fever blisters) are most often caused by the herpes simplex virus (type 1).

What are the symptoms of cold sores?

Cold sores usually appear in the mouth or around the lips. They begin as blisters with clear fluid, then crust over. They may be accompanied by fever, irritability, and tender and swollen lymph nodes.

How serious are cold sores?

Cold sores can be painful but are rarely serious. Newborn infants and persons with weakened immune systems can become severely ill from the virus, so it is important to protect them from cold sores.

How does a person get cold sores?

The virus that causes cold sores is spread when fluid from the sores or saliva from an infected person comes in direct contact with another person's skin, nose, mouth, or eyes.

How long does it take to come down with cold sores after a person is exposed?

Cold sores can appear 2 days to 2 weeks after exposure.

When is a person with cold sores contagious?

During the first infection with the virus that causes cold sores, a person is infectious for at least a week, especially while the sores are open. After the sores heal, a person is less infectious but can sometimes still spread the virus for several weeks. A person who has had cold sores before will be most contagious for 3-4 days after the cold sores first reappear.

How can I help prevent the spread of cold sores?

- Wash hands well and often with soap and water, especially after touching sores or wiping a nose.
- Cover coughs and sneezes and put used tissues into a trash can.
- Clean, rinse, and sanitize toys regularly at child care and after contact with saliva or the mouth of a child.
- Prevent sharing of food, drink, and personal items which may touch the mouth, such as cups, eating utensils, toothbrushes, or towels.
- Cover sore(s) with bandage(s) when possible.
- Avoid kissing anyone with cold sores on the mouth.
- Prevent persons with cold sores from kissing others, especially infants.

What is the treatment for cold sores?

There is no cure for cold sores. Sores heal by themselves if they are kept clean and dry and do not become infected by bacteria. Some people find that petroleum jelly ointment makes cold sores less painful. Encourage children to drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.

If my child develops cold sores, must s/he stay away from child care?

Infants and toddlers generally must stay home because of their tendency to put toys and other items in their mouths. Older children can attend childcare as long as they have control of drooling and do not have any other symptoms that would require exclusion.

