

Title: Cold Sores: What are they? What can I do?

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Abstract: Cold sores are a common mouth sore caused by herpes simplex virus and first infection can be treated with antiviral medication, acyclovir, within 3 days to decrease how long the sores are present and the pain that comes with the sores.

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# **COLD SORES**

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(Fever blister / Herpes labialis / oral herpes)

## **What are cold sores?**

Cause: VIRUS - Herpes simplex virus

Symptoms: Small, often painful blisters on skin of lips, mouth, gums or face.

## **Herpes?!...Do I have an STD?**

**NO.** Herpes viruses can cause both mouth and genital sores and they are often from different types of herpes viruses. Most of the time mouth herpes only comes from other people with mouth sores.

## **Time Course:**

Contact infected person → first symptoms → sores gone → → → sores recur  
(1-3 weeks later) (after 7-10 days) (weeks to years later)

## **Why do cold sores come back?**

The virus that causes cold sores never goes away. The sores will go away but the virus hides in nerves in your body. When stressed by sun or illness, the virus comes out of hiding and a cold sore comes back, often to the same location as the first sore.

## **How do I treat the sore?**

- With no treatment sores and symptoms leave in 1-2 weeks.
- Antiviral medication (like acyclovir) can shorten the time of discomfort and decrease pain for first infection if started within 3 days of first sore.
- Wash blisters gently with soap and water to prevent spread.

## **Call the clinic when...**

- Symptoms more than 1 to 2 weeks, severe symptoms or eye problems.

## **Prevention...**

- Don't touch other people's cold sores.
- Don't share kisses, eating utensils, shaving razors or towels with someone with cold sores present.
- Avoid sun exposure or use sun block.
- Stay healthy, get enough sleep, and keep your hands clean.

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