

HERPES SIMPLEX VIRUS INFECTION

Fever Blisters and Cold Sores



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Cold sores and fever blisters afflict more than half the adult population and are the result of an infection with the Herpes Simplex Virus (HSV). As the common names indicate, cold sores and fever blisters frequently develop when an individual has a cold or fever. Other common triggers include exposure to the sun or wind, dental procedures or trauma to the area, certain medical procedures such as chemical peels or laser treatments, emotional distress, intestinal illness and the onset of menstruation. It can recur in the same spot every few weeks or can surface once a year in a new location. Some patients experience a stinging or tingling sensation at the site immediately prior to the appearance of the herpetic lesion. The lesion starts as a bump or swelling, which then develops superficial blisters or crusts. Once the cold sore appears, it can take 2 to 4 weeks to heal completely.

How Do You Get Herpes?

Most people are infected with the HSV virus during infancy or childhood from close contact with family members or friends who carry the virus. It can be transmitted by kissing, sharing eating utensils, or by sharing towels. The sores most commonly affect the lips, mouth, nose, chin, or cheeks, and occur shortly after exposure. Some patients experience only mild symptoms or outbreaks, while others have outbreaks that prompt them to seek medical attention.

Cold Sore Warning Signs

Some patients experience symptoms that may signal the impending arrival of a cold sore. Itching, tingling, or stinging can indicate when a sore is going to appear. The immediate use of a topical and/or oral medication at the first sign of an impending outbreak may prevent a full outbreak or minimize the duration and severity of symptoms.

Prevention & Treatment

While it is impossible to avoid all potential trigger factors, there are certain precautions that may reduce the frequency of outbreaks. Lips can be conditioned to be more resistant to cold sores by using products that hydrate the lips and contain a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 20 to protect from harmful ultraviolet rays that may trigger an outbreak. All cold sore sufferers should avoid unnecessary exposure to the sun and wind and should not aggravate a sore by touching it.

Depending on the frequency of your outbreaks, you may be advised to use a prescription medication to help minimize your symptoms and possibly help the cold sore heal faster. There are topical medications, both over the counter and prescription, which may provide some relief. There are also oral medications that have proven helpful, especially if taken at the first sign of an outbreak.

Long Term Prognosis

There is no medication that will eliminate the herpes virus from your system. A patient, once infected with the herpes simplex virus, continuously sheds viral particles and can therefore spread the infection, even when there are no visible signs of infection or cold sores present. Care must therefore be taken to avoid spreading the infection to others.