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URL of this page: <https://medlineplus.gov/coldsores.html>

Cold Sores

Also called: Fever blister, Oral herpes

Cold sores are caused by a contagious virus called herpes simplex virus [<https://medlineplus.gov/herpessimplex.html>] (HSV). There are two types of HSV. Type 1 usually causes oral herpes, or cold sores. Type 1 herpes virus infects more than half of the U.S. population by the time they reach their 20s. Type 2 usually affects the genital area [<https://medlineplus.gov/genitalherpes.html>].

Some people have no symptoms from the infection. But others develop painful and unsightly cold sores. Cold sores usually occur outside the mouth, on or around the lips. When they are inside the mouth, they are usually on the gums or the roof of the mouth. They are not the same as canker sores [<https://medlineplus.gov/cankersores.html>], which are not contagious.

There is no cure for cold sores. They normally go away on their own in a few weeks. Antiviral medicines can help them heal faster. They can also help to prevent cold sores in people who often get them. Other medicines can help with the pain and discomfort of the sores. These include ointments that numb the blisters, soften the crusts of the sores, or dry them out. Protecting your lips from the sun with sunblock lip balm can also help.

Start Here

- Cold Sore [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/cold-sore/symptoms-causes/syc-20371017?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/cold-sore/symptoms-causes/syc-20371017?p=1>]
- Fever Blisters and Canker Sores [<https://www.nidcr.nih.gov/health-info/fever-blisters-canker-sores>]
 (National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.nidcr.nih.gov/espanol/temas-de-salud/las-calenturas-labiales-y-las-aftas-bucales>]

Related Issues

- Can You Get Genital Herpes from a Cold Sore? [<https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/hsv1-sores.html>] (Nemours Foundation)

Images

- Cold Sores (Orofacial Herpes) [<https://skinsight.com/skin-conditions/orofacial-herpes-simplex-virus-hsv/?lmiw9cApI=1>] (VisualDX)

Clinical Trials

- ClinicalTrials.gov: Herpes Labialis [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22Herpes+Labialis%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]
 (National Institutes of Health)

Journal Articles

References and abstracts from MEDLINE/PubMed (National Library of Medicine)

- Article: Effect of combined antimicrobial photodynamic therapy and photobiomodulation therapy in the... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40346266>]

- Article: Evaluating the effectiveness of topical olive leaf extract emulgel in managing... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/39623211>]
- Article: Therapeutic effects of acyclovir and acyclovir-clobetasol nanofibers vs. cream formulation for... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/39506756>]
- Cold Sores -- see more articles [<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=%22Herpes+Labialis%22%5Bmajr%3Anoexp%5D+AND+humans%5Bmh%5D+AND+english%5Bla%5D+AND+%22Iast+2+Years%22+%5Bedat%5D+NOT+%28letter%5Bpt%5D+OR+case+reports%5Bpt%5D+OR+editorial%5Bpt%5D+OR+comment%5Bpt%5D%29>]

Find an Expert

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [<https://www.cdc.gov/>] Also in Spanish [<https://www.cdc.gov/spanish/>]
- National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases [<https://www.niaid.nih.gov/>] 

Children

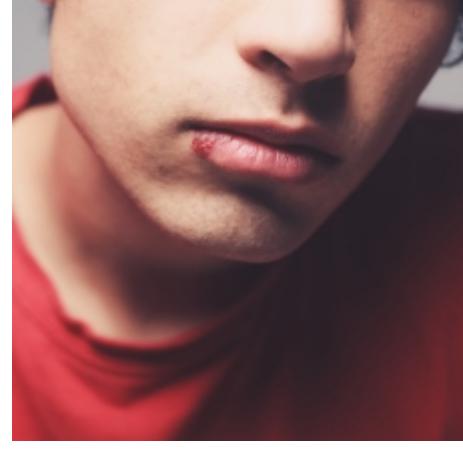
- Cold Sores (For Kids) [<https://kidshealth.org/en/kids/cold-sores.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/kids/cold-sores.html>]
- Cold Sores in Children: About the Herpes Simplex Virus [<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/skin/Pages/Herpes-Simplex-Virus-Cold-Sores.aspx>] (American Academy of Pediatrics)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.healthychildren.org/spanish/health-issues/conditions/skin/paginas/herpes-simplex-virus-cold-sores.aspx>]

Teenagers

- Cold Sores (HSV-1): Symptoms, Causes and Prevention [<https://kidshealth.org/en/teens/cold-sores.html>] (Nemours Foundation)
Also in Spanish [<https://kidshealth.org/es/teens/cold-sores.html>]

Patient Handouts

- Herpes - oral [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000606.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/000606.htm>]
- Herpetic stomatitis [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001383.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/001383.htm>]
- Mouth sores [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003059.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/003059.htm>]



MEDICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

[Herpes - oral](https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000606.htm) [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000606.htm>]

[Herpetic stomatitis](https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001383.htm) [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001383.htm>]

Related Health Topics

[Herpes Simplex](https://medlineplus.gov/herpessimplex.html) [<https://medlineplus.gov/herpessimplex.html>]

[Mouth Disorders](https://medlineplus.gov/mouthdisorders.html) [<https://medlineplus.gov/mouthdisorders.html>]

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