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Gingivostomatitis

Gingivostomatitis is an infection of the mouth and gums that leads to swelling and sores. It may be due to a virus or bacteria.

Causes

Gingivostomatitis is common among children. It may occur after infection with the herpes simplex virus type 1 (HSV-1), which also causes cold sores.

The condition may also occur after infection with a coxsackie virus.

It may occur in people with poor oral hygiene.

Symptoms

The symptoms can be mild or severe and may include:

- Bad breath
- Fever
- General discomfort, uneasiness, or ill feeling (malaise)
- Sores on the inside of the cheeks or gums
- Very sore mouth with no desire to eat

Exams and Tests

Your health care provider will check your mouth for small ulcers. These sores are similar to mouth ulcers caused by other conditions. Cough, fever, or muscle aches may indicate other conditions.

Most of the time, no special tests are needed to diagnose gingivostomatitis. However, the provider may take a swab from the sore to check for a viral or bacterial infection. This is called a culture. A biopsy may be done to rule out other types of mouth ulcers.

Treatment

The goal of treatment is to reduce symptoms.

Things you can do at home include:

- Practice good oral hygiene. Brush your gums well to reduce the risk of getting another infection.
- Use mouth rinses that reduce pain if your provider recommends them.
- Rinse your mouth with salt water (1/2 tsp [3 g] salt in 1 cup [240 mL] of water) or mouthwashes with hydrogen peroxide or Xylocaine to ease discomfort.
- Eat a healthy diet. Soft, bland (non-spicy) foods may reduce discomfort during eating.

You may need to take antibiotics.

You may need to have the infected tissue removed by the dentist (called debridement).

Outlook (Prognosis)

Gingivostomatitis infections range from mild to severe and painful. The sores often get better in 2 or 3 weeks with or without treatment. Treatment may reduce discomfort and speed healing.

Possible Complications

Gingivostomatitis may disguise other, more serious mouth ulcers.

When to Contact a Medical Professional

Contact your provider if:

- You have mouth sores and fever or other signs of illness
- Mouth sores get worse or do not respond to treatment within 3 weeks
- You develop swelling in the mouth

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