

Patient Information for Herpes simplex virus in Infant/Neonate/Child/Adult

Overview

Herpes simplex virus (HSV) is a common infection that can cause skin or mouth sores, which are also called cold sores or fever blisters. The first eruption, or outbreak, is called primary herpes. This may be more severe than the more commonly recognized secondary, or recurrent, herpes infections.

Both herpes simplex virus type 1 (HSV-1) and herpes simplex virus type 2 (HSV-2) can cause infection. HSV-1 is the most common cause of lesions that appear around the mouth and on the lips. HSV-2 more commonly causes genital herpes, although HSV-1 can also be a cause. Both conditions are highly contagious and are spread by direct contact with the lesions of another infected individual. The virus can even spread in the absence of symptoms or visible lesions.

The attacks of both forms of HSV usually recur in the same skin region, and most individuals report burning, itching, and a tingling sensation before the actual lesions appear.

HSV can occur on virtually any body surface.

The primary episode usually heals in 7–10 days. Once a person is infected, the virus tends to stay hidden in the body (latent) lifelong.

Who's At Risk

Infection with HSV is very common. Most people never even know they have been infected, as their immune system suppresses symptoms. At least one-third of individuals are infected by HSV by the end of childhood.

Some people will have symptoms when first infected; the infection may be more severe in those with a weak immune system.

Signs & Symptoms

Recurring HSV presents as a painful rash, often preceded by itching or tingling. Lesions start as blisters that then become crusted.

Primary herpes looks different than recurrent herpes attacks. Most commonly, primary herpes is seen in children with painful blisters and erosions of the gums and the skin around or lining the mouth. There may also be fever, swollen lymph nodes in the neck, irritability, and a poor appetite. If HSV was introduced on other body sites, there will be painful blisters and sores in that location (finger, face, genitals) with swelling and similar systemic symptoms.

Self-Care Guidelines

- Acetaminophen or ibuprofen for pain. Relief of pain is important so that eating and sleeping are possible.
- Drink as much fluid as possible to avoid dehydration.
- Avoid contact with others, especially children and newborns and those with eczema or a weak immune system, until healed.

When to Seek Medical Care

Although those with mild recurrent herpes often do not need any medical care, see your doctor if the condition is bothersome.

Treatments Your Physician May Prescribe

Antiviral medications may be prescribed (acyclovir, valacyclovir, famciclovir). Anesthetic mouthwashes or pain medication may reduce pain.