Fight your Cold-sores!

Do you have an itchy tingling sensation and redness around your lips? Well, this signals that you might get cold sores in the next 24 hours!

Cold sores, also called fever blisters, are tiny, fluid-filled lesions that occur on and around your lips. These blisters are often grouped together in patches. After the blisters break, a crust forms over the resulting sore. Cold sores usually heal within two weeks.

Cold sores and fever blisters tend to develop when an individual has a cold or fever but can also be triggered by sun exposure, emotional distress, intestinal illness and menstruation. These blisters can recur in the same spot or in different locations with a frequency ranging from weekly to yearly--some people infected with the virus never develop blisters. A sore or blister will typically take a few days to break. It will be contagious to others as long as it is visible and occasionally even beyond.



Symptoms

Symptoms can vary, depending on whether this is your first outbreak or a recurrence. During first-time outbreaks, some people also experience fever, sore throat, headache, muscle aches or swollen lymph nodes.

Children under 5 years old may have cold sores inside their mouths and the lesions are commonly mistaken for canker sores. For people who do develop signs and symptoms, a cold sore usually passes through several stages, which include:

- Tingling and itching. Many people feel an itching, burning or tingling sensation around their lips for a day or two before cold sore blisters erupt.
- Blisters. Small fluid-filled blisters typically break out along the border where the outside edge of the lips meets the skin of the face, although the blisters can also occur around the nose or on the cheeks.
- Oozing and crusting. The small blisters may merge and then burst, leaving shallow open sores that will ooze fluid and then crust over.

Causes

Cold sores are caused by certain strains of the herpes simplex virus (HSV). HSV-1 usually causes cold sores. HSV-2 is usually responsible for genital herpes. However, either type can cause sores in the facial area or on the genitals. You get the first episode of herpes infection from another person who has an active lesion. Shared eating utensils, razors and towels, as well as kissing, may spread HSV-1. While cold sores are most contagious when they are oozing fluid, the virus can be transmitted to others even during times when you have no blisters.

Easing the pain

In most cases cold sores generally clear up without treatment and do not require seeing, a doctor. However it is wise to see a doctor if you have frequent recurrences of cold sores or you have a weakened immune system and also the sores don't within two weeks. Several types of prescription antiviral drugs may speed the healing process. Applying ice or washcloths soaked in cold water to the blisters may help ease symptoms. Lip balms containing 1 percent lemon extract seem to shorten healing time and prevent recurrence. Foods rich in lysine include vegetables, beans, fish, and chicken can also help to heal the sore. If your cold sores are triggered by stress, you might want to try relaxation techniques such as deep-breathing exercises or meditation.

For you to keep in mind

- Canker sore and fever blister are not the same, though both of them are painful oral abrasions. A fever blister appears on the upper surface of the lips whereas a canker sore appears on the movable parts of the mouth such as the tongue or the inside linings of the lips and cheeks
- A fever blister, unlike a canker sore, is very contagious.
- In most cases, fever blisters don't require a doctor's visit, though there are exceptions.
- It is advisable for a cold sore sufferer to avoid unnecessary exposure to the sun and wind, and not to worsen a sore by touching or poking it.