

# Cold sores

## Information for parents who have cold sores

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### What is a cold sore?

- A cold sore is a common infection caused by a virus called Herpes Simplex.
- Symptoms usually develop 2 to 12 days after contact with the virus.
- The virus causes blisters on the face or lips, which crust over and then heal. The area is usually painful and may itch, burn or tingle.
- A cold sore usually lasts for a week or two.
- The first time you have a cold sore, you may also have a fever and feel ill.
- The blister goes away, but once infected the virus stays with you for life. It stays dormant or “asleep” in your body. The virus may become active at any time and cause cold sores again.

**For most healthy adults, a cold sore is a mild infection. However, for babies, a herpes simplex infection can be very serious and life threatening.**

### How is the virus spread?

The virus is easily spread by:

- direct contact with the cold sore
- on hands that have become contaminated when they touched the cold sore
- in the saliva (spit) of someone with the virus

**The virus can be spread even if you have no symptoms.**



Visitors with cold sores are not allowed in the nursery.

## How are cold sores treated?

If you have a cold sore you do not need treatment, but you can relieve symptoms with ice and a cold sore ointment.

Babies in the Neonatal Nurseries who develop this infection may need treatment with anti-viral medications to prevent a serious illness.

## What should I do if I have a cold sore or feel like I'm getting one?



Parents with cold sores must take care not to spread the infection to their baby and other babies in the nursery.

When you are in the Neonatal Nursery:

- Clean your hands often with soap and warm water or hand sanitizer. This is the best way to prevent spreading the infection.
- Wear a mask. This will help you to not touch the cold sore or your face while being with your baby or breastfeeding.
- Do not touch the sores. If you touch them, you must clean your hands before touching anything else.
- Do not kiss your baby.
- Do not have contact with another baby in the NICU.

You should also follow these precautions if you get a cold sore when you and your baby are at home.

## For more information visit:

The Merck Manual of Medical Information:

<http://www.merck.com/mmhe/sec17/ch198/ch198e.html>

WHO World Health Organization

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/herpes-simplex-virus#hsv1>

**Stop the spread of germs and infection.  
Clean your hands.**



This fact sheet provides basic general information only and is to be used as a quick guide, not as a complete resource on the subject. If you have any further questions, ask Infection Prevention & Control or your health care provider.