

Herpes Simplex (Cold Sores, Herpetic Whitlow, Genital Herpes)

What is Herpes Simplex?

Herpes Simplex, sometimes called cold sores or fever blisters, are groups of small blisters on the lip and around the mouth or on the genitals. There are two types of herpes simplex virus: HSV-1 and HSV-2. Both virus types can cause sores around the mouth (herpes labialis), around the hands (herpetic whitlow) or on the genitals (genital herpes).

What are the symptoms of Herpes Simplex?

The first symptoms of cold sores may include pain around your mouth and on your lips, a fever, a sore throat, or swollen glands in your neck or other parts of the body. After the blisters appear, the cold sores usually break open, leak a clear fluid, and then crust over and disappear after several days to 2 weeks. For some people, cold sores can be very painful.

Some people have the virus but don't get cold sores. They have no symptoms.

How is Herpes Simplex spread?

The herpes simplex virus enters the body through a break in the skin. It is spread when a person touches a cold sore or touches infected fluid such as kissing an infected person or touching that person's saliva. Cold sores can also be spread to other areas of the body.

When is a person infectious?

A person is infectious while the cold sore lesions are active (blistered, weeping or open, and moist) until the lesions are dried, crusted and no longer weeping.

It is possible to shed the virus intermittently without any symptoms.

How do I know if I am immune?

The herpes simplex virus can't be cured. After you get infected, the virus stays in your body for the rest of your life. If you get sores often, treatment can reduce the number of cold sores you get and how severe they are.

When is an employee exposed?

An employee is considered exposed if there is direct or indirect contact (through non-intact skin or mucous membranes) with infectious oral or genital secretions, lesion drainage, or any secretions or excretions.

What happens if an employee is exposed?

If an employee is exposed to cold sores, he/she do not need to alter any activities and can continue to work.

What happens if an employee has a Cold Sore, Herpetic Whitlow or Genital Herpes?

Lesions to the **face**:

- Wear a protective dressing during patient care to prevent hand contact with the lesions.
- Emphasize hand washing
- Exclude employees with lesions that cannot be covered with a protective dressing from having direct contact with high-risk patients, such as newborns, burn patients, or immunocompromised patients. Reassign employee to low-risk patients.

Lesions to the hands or fingers (**herpetic whitlow**):

- Refer symptomatic employee for confirmation of diagnosis and for clinical management to a family physician. This may include laboratory investigation and oral antiviral therapy.
- Exclude symptomatic employees from having direct contact with patients until lesions are healed (dry, crusted and no longer weeping) or reassign to non-patient care tasks. If reassigned, ensure his/her hygiene and hand-washing are not compromised.

Employees may return to regular duties when sores are completely dry, crusted and no longer weeping.

Lesions to the genitals (**genital herpes**):

- No work modifications required.
- Emphasize hand washing especially after using the bathroom

Manager/Supervisor Responsibilities:

Review the information above. Refer symptomatic employees to the Workplace Health Call Centre Occupational Health Nurse (WHCC OHN) if the employee is reassigned or excluded from work.

Employee Responsibilities:

Review the information above. Contact the WHCC OHN at 1-866-922-9464 if you are symptomatic and will be reassigned or excluded from work.

Additional Information/References:

- Canada Communicable Disease Report. [Prevention & Control of Occupational Infections in Health Care](#). March 2002. Retrieved on August 22, 2017.
- HealthLinkBC Health Topic: [Genital Herpes](#). October 17, 2016. Retrieved on August 2, 2017.
- HealthLinkBC Health Topic: [Cold Sores](#). June 6, 2017. Retrieved on August 2, 2017.
- HealthLink BC Health Topic: [Other Health Problems Caused by the Herpes Simplex Virus](#). May 27, 2016. Retrieved on August 2, 2017.
- Fraser Health Authority Intranet (FHPulse). Workplace Health. [Herpes Simplex](#). September 2010. Retrieved on August 2, 2017.
- HealthLinkBC Health Topic: [Herpes Simplex](#). May 27, 2016. Retrieved on August 2, 2017.