Mouth Sores (Viral)  
Herpes Gingivostomatitis

Viruses are tiny germs that can cause mouth sores as well as other illnesses. Some mouth sores are caused by the herpes virus. This is one of the germs that cause cold sores or fever blisters. It is not caused by sexual activity nor related to it. If your doctor has diagnosed your child with mouth sores, there are several important things you should know.

Possible signs and symptoms

- Fever that comes on suddenly
- Child is very grouchy or has no energy
- Small mouth sores and fluid-filled blisters that may be on the tongue and roof of the mouth.
- Swollen gums that may bleed.
- Severe mouth pain
- Will not eat or drink or poor appetite

How to care for your child

- Mouth sores can last from 7 to 10 days. They should heal without leaving a scar.
- Keep your child home from school or childcare if he has a fever above 100°F. Your child should be free of fever for 24 hours before going back to school.
- For children under 1 year of age, give formula or Pedialyte®.
- For children over 1 year of age, give lots of liquids such as water, milk and popsicles (Picture 1). Avoid fruit juices that are high in acid such as orange juice. Juices that are high in acid may irritate the child’s mouth sores.
- Give soft foods often, but do not force your child to eat. Your child may have less appetite with mouth sores, but it is important to make sure the child keeps taking liquids.
- Your doctor may prescribe medicines to soothe the mouth sores or reduce the swelling.

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How to care for your child, continued

- Your doctor may suggest acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (Motrin®, Advil®) for pain or fever. Read the label carefully and make sure you are giving your child the right dose. Ibuprofen should not be given to children that are younger than 6 months old unless the child’s doctor says to use it.
- Do not give your child aspirin or products that contain aspirin.

How to protect others

Most viruses are spread by contact through droplets carried in the air from someone who is infected coughing or sneezing. Contact with saliva from the mouths of others can also spread the virus.

To protect others:

- Avoid close contact with your child’s face or mouth such as by kissing or hugging until the sore is healed.
- Wash your hands after touching your child’s face or mouth.
- Be sure to wash your child’s bottles, pacifier, eating utensils and cups in hot soapy water.
- Do not let other children use your child’s bottle or pacifier or touch things that may have come in contact with the mouth sore.
- Soak any washable toys in a bleach solution for 2 minutes. (Mix 2 tablespoons of household bleach in one quart of water.) Rinse well with plain water and air-dry.

When to call the doctor

Call your child’s doctor if your child:

- Has a fever over 101°F for more than 7 days.
- Stops drinking liquids.
- Gets even fussier.
- Has any sign of dehydration (stops crying tears; has very little urine; has dry, cracked lips; acts very tired or lazy).

If you have any questions, be sure to ask your child’s doctor or nurse.