

Cold Sores, HPV & Oral Cancer

Frequently Asked Questions



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Cold sores, also called “fever blisters”, are painful, fluid-filled blisters that can appear anywhere in your orofacial region, including your lips, mouth, cheeks & nose. They are unattractive, painful & can make everyday social interactions awkward & uncomfortable. Furthermore, evidence may point to a relationship between cold sores, HPV & oral cancer.

Herpes Simplex Virus (HSV)		Human Papillomavirus (HPV)
HSV-1	HSV-2	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HSV-1 is a type of herpes simplex virus that causes cold sores to appear as blisters in the <i>orofacial</i> region of the body • HSV-1 does not cause genital herpes • However, sometimes HSV-1 can appear on the genitals as blisters if the anogenital region comes into contact with active cold sore blisters in the orofacial region • Certain HSV-1 isolates have become the #1 cause of genital blister infections in university students in North America 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HSV-2 is a type of herpes simplex virus that causes the Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) genital herpes to appear as blisters in the <i>anogenital</i> region of the body (cervix, vulva, vagina, anus, penis) • HSV-2 does not cause cold sores • However, sometimes HSV-2 can appear on the mouth as blisters if the orofacial region comes into direct contact with active herpes blisters in the anogenital region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HPV is a group of STI viruses capable of infecting the mucous membranes & skin of humans (anogenital & oropharyngeal) • HPV is not the same as herpes simplex virus & does not cause cold sores or genital herpes • HPV is responsible for causing nearly 100% of cervical cancer cases & can sometimes appear as warts on the genitals

How can cold sores be prevented?

Cold sores are *very* contagious & can be spread by kissing or close skin contact. To help prevent cold sores:

- Avoid close skin contact & kissing others when active cold sores are present
- Avoid sharing food, cups, utensils, toothbrushes, towels, pillows & lip balm when active cold sores are present
- Wash your hands well and frequently to avoid infecting others as well as other areas of your own body
- Avoid potential cold sore triggers such as stress, sun overexposure & a weakened immune system



Can cold sores be cured?

There is no cure for cold sores as they are permanent & can recur frequently throughout the course of your life. As well, treatment is generally unnecessary, as cold sores tend to heal & resolve on their own within a week.

Over-the-counter topical ointments that contain benzocaine, lidocaine, dibucaine or docosanol can be applied directly to the cold sore & areas around the cold sore to help relieve painful symptoms.

Is there a link between cold sores, HPV & oral cancer?

There is an indirect link between cold sores, HPV & oral cancer. **It is important to minimize the recurrence & spread of cold sore blisters (HSV-1) because having active cold sore blisters that have spread to your anogenital region may increase your risk of getting HPV, and there is strong evidence that HPV may cause oral cancer.**

Get your yearly oral cancer check. It could save your life.

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Sources

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³Roberts, Craig M., Pfister, John R. & Spear, Scott J. (2003). Increasing Proportion of Herpes Simplex Virus Type 1 as a Cause of Genital Herpes Infection in College Students [Electronic Version]. *Sexually Transmitted Diseases*, 30(10), 797-800.