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BEAUTY SMARTS

# Cold Sore Comfort

Whether you use the term cold sore, fever blister, or oral herpes, those painful—and embarrassing—outbreaks can feel as though they last an eternity. Our experts advise how to shorten and even avoid them.



**IF YOU HAVE COLD SORES, ENDURING A FLARE-UP CAN BE PAINFUL—** both physically and emotionally—and you may feel like you’re the only one. Yet more than half of Americans ages 14 to 49 have herpes simplex virus type 1, or HSV-1, the virus that causes cold sores.

What can you do? First, understand what you’re dealing with. HSV-1 is an incurable virus that can lay dormant in nerves after the initial exposure. Usually some stress “reactivates” the virus, causing it to replicate and triggering the immune system to react. The result: a lesion on the outside of the mouth. “Some people never have a flare; others may have [only] one, and some have repeated sores,” says Kate Holcomb, MD, a dermatologist in New Orleans and a clinical assistant professor of dermatology at Tulane University School of Medicine.

The reason so many people carry the virus is because it’s very easily spread, and those who have it often don’t know, says Robert Anolik, MD, a dermatologist in New York City and clinical assistant professor of dermatology at the New York University School of Medicine. “The theory is that the virus is obtained in early childhood, when family members, like parents or grandparents, kiss you.” Eating or drinking from the same cup, plate, or silverware after someone infected has done so or sharing a lip balm are also sources of infection. Plus, you can spread the virus even

with no visible sign or symptom of a cold sore. Even more frustrating, you could have the herpes virus and never develop a cold sore, but still spread it.

Just because you have a sore on or in your mouth doesn’t mean it’s herpes. “I sometimes have patients who think they have a cold sore virus, but they have aphthous ulcers,” Anolik says. Also called canker sores, these small, shallow ulcers develop inside the lip. They aren’t contagious but may coincide with a cold sore, causing the confusion.

**WHAT CAUSES A FLARE**

“Stress, whether physical or emotional, can weaken the immune system and give the virus an opportunity to replicate,” Anolik explains. Sunlight and cold temperatures as well as hormonal changes due to

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**James M. Crouse, DDS**  
*dentist, Salisbury, Maryland*



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**CURAPROX Black Is White Charcoal Toothpaste** (\$33.28)  
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**Gary Glassman, DDS**  
*dentist, Toronto, Canada*



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*“This rinse is not only really good at killing bad breath-causing bacteria but it also spruces up and brightens the teeth when combined with regular brushing and flossing.”*  
**Lee Gause, DDS**  
*dentist, New York City*