



# your HEALTH

**GET IN TOUCH:**  
Have you struggled with a difficult health problem? We want to tell your story. Contact our health correspondent Cathy Buss on 0116 222 4261, email catherinebuss@leicestermercury.co.uk

Dentist **ADAM PATEL** answers readers' questions about the herpes simplex virus

**C**old sores are blisters that form around the lips and mouth caused by the herpes simplex virus (HSV) type 1.

A common myth is that they occur as a result of colds and fevers, which is not true.

#### How do they appear?

They appear as small fluid-filled blisters, usually developing on or around the lips.

The blisters eventually rupture and ooze before crusting over and clearing up spontaneously after about a week to 10 days.

A fever, flu-like symptoms and swollen lymph nodes in the neck often accompany the first attack.

A tingling sensation and itchiness in the area of a previous outbreak are often symptoms of a recurrent attack.

#### Are cold sores contagious?

Yes. Cold sores can be passed on via physical contact of the lips, sharing of cutlery, towels or any other forms of close contact. They remain contagious until they are completely healed.

Genital herpes, although less common, can also be caused by HSV type 1.

A person with a cold sore who performs oral sex on another person can give that person genital lesions with HSV type 1 and, similarly, genital HSV type 2 lesions can be spread to the lips.

#### What if I have the virus that causes cold sores?

About six out of 10 people carry the HSV type 1, thus it is commonplace.

In fact, many are unaware they carry the virus as it can be symptomless. If you have contracted the virus, sores may develop as late as 20 days after initial exposure to the virus.

Once the virus enters your body, it can stay dormant and emerge several years later.

#### Is there any warning before a cold sore occurs?

Commonly, two days before an attack you may experience itching, sensitivity or a slight tingling sensation at the site.

#### I have the virus and have suffered with cold sores previously. Are there any factors that can increase the chances of me getting a cold sore?

Yes. The virus can be triggered by certain foods, stress, fever, colds, allergies, sunburn and menstruation. Remember, these are trigger factors for people who are already carrying the virus.

#### Are there any potentially serious complications associated with cold sores?

Yes. Some children affected by them can become more seriously ill.

## When cold sores attack



#### HOW CAN I PREVENT THEM?

■ Wash your hands after touching a cold sore.

■ Do not rub your eyes after touching your cold sore – you could develop an ocular herpes infection, which may lead to blindness if left untreated.

■ Do not touch your genitals after touching your cold sore – you could develop a type of genital herpes.

■ Do not kiss someone who has a cold sore or use the same utensils, towels or razors.

■ Use sunscreen to face and lips before exposure to the sun.

However, many of us will develop antibodies after the first infection and never suffer from them again. Those who don't develop antibodies usually tend to get recurrences, precipitated by the trigger factors mentioned above.

The infection may also be life-threatening for anybody who carries the HIV virus, has Aids or whose immune system is suppressed by other disorders or

medications. Infections from a cold sore virus may cause blindness if it spreads to the eye and meningitis or encephalitis if it spreads to the brain.

#### When should I seek medical advice about my cold sores?

You should seek medical advice if you develop associated high temperature or fever. If the sores are extremely painful, a prescription relief may be given but there are no medications that will remove the cold sore quicker than its life-cycle of seven to 10 days.

Once the cold sore is active it will remain for the intended period of time.

#### Is there any medication I can take when I get the "warning" symptoms such as tingling?

Yes. Before the cold sore develops, anti-viral medication can help reduce the life-span and associated symptoms of the cold

sore. Once it has developed, the effect of this medication is significantly reduced.

#### What else can help relieve the pain and symptoms of a cold sore?

Cold sores cannot be cured, but the pain can definitely be controlled. By avoiding spicy and acidic foods, applying ice and using other approved over-the-counter preparations, the symptoms can be alleviated.

If your cold sore is especially painful or irritating, your clinician may prescribe an anaesthetic gel to alleviate pain or an antiviral medication to try to help speed healing or prevent recurrence.

These oral medications are more effective when started within the first 48 hours of the outbreak.

Cold sores may also become complicated by a bacterial infection, so it is important to keep them clean by washing gently with soap and water as and when required.

## ASK THE EXPERT

THE Leicester Mercury has teamed up with Leicestershire dentist Dr Adam Patel (pictured) to help readers with any dental and oral health problems they might have.

People are invited to send in any questions and Dr Patel will answer a selection of them through a regular column on this page, in the Mercury's Monday Woman section.

Dr Patel said: "I hope I will be able to help people with information and advice, which they can put into practice."

"My experience in seeing patients is that there is quite a lack of dental and oral health information and education."

"Your mouth is the start of your digestive system and people often don't realise there is a distinct link between oral and general health."

"It can also have a big impact on a person's psychological and social wellbeing. Bad oral health is very visible and can impact on aspects of life, from a person's personal life to getting a job."

Dr Patel, who was educated at the City of Leicester School and Sixth Form College, said: "I hope I will be able to help readers with the information I can provide."

Dr Patel's replies should only be used as a reference – he is not a replacement for your own dentist.

If you have a query you would like to raise, please summarise it in about 200 words and e-mail it to the address below. Put "health questions" in the subject line.

Alternatively, send your 200-word summary to Cathy Buss, Health Questions, Leicester Mercury, St George Street, Leicester, LE1 9FQ.

Please note, an edited version of the information you send us might appear on this page.

Please include a contact name and phone number in case we have any queries about your submission.

These details will not be published.

Dr Patel will not be able to send personal responses to letters.

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