

Dear Parent or guardian:

___ A child in our program has oral herpes (cold sore or fever blisters).

WHAT IS IT? Herpes is a virus that commonly causes mouth sores in children and adults. The first infection often occurs in early childhood and lasts 1-2 weeks. Symptoms may include fever, painful mouth sores, and swelling of the gums, which can make it uncomfortable to eat and drink. Although the sores resolve on their own, the herpes virus remains in the body and can recur in response to illness, sun exposure, or stress. Oral herpes recurs as blister around the lip (“cold sores” or “fever blisters”) which usually resolve within 1 week.

HOW IS IT SPREAD? Oral herpes is spread by contact with the mouth sores or saliva. It can be spread by kissing on the lips and sharing food, bottles, pacifiers, eating utensils, mouthed toys, and toothbrushes. It is also spread by thumb sucking or touching the mouth sores and then touching another person’s mouth.

WHEN IS IT CONTAGIOUS? Herpes is contagious in the several days before the start of symptoms until the sores are healed. It may also be contagious at times when no sores are apparent. After exposure to herpes, it can take 2-8 weeks to develop symptoms.

HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED AND TREATED? Oral herpes infection is usually diagnosed by the typical symptoms. Usually no treatment is needed for oral herpes other than rest, nutrition, and plenty of fluids.

SHOULD THE CHILD STAY AT HOME? A child with oral herpes infection should stay home if the child is drooling.

HOW CAN WE LIMIT THE SPREAD?

- Don’t kiss children on the mouth-hug them and kiss them on the forehead instead.
- Don’t share food, pacifiers, bottles, or toothbrushes. Wash eating utensils and drinking cups well between uses.
- Clean and disinfect mouthed toys and dining tables after each use. Clean and disinfect water fountains, telephone receivers, and other frequently handled items daily.

Taken from Keeping Kids Healthy: Preventing and Managing Communicable Disease in Child Care; Caring for our Children: National Health and Safety Performance Standards.