Primary Herpetic Gingivostomatitis

Primary herpetic gingivostomatitis is an infection of the mouth, gums and throat. It is a common infection in children, teenagers and young adults.

CAUSES

Primary herpetic gingivostomatitis is caused by a virus called herpes simplex type 1 (HSV). This is the same virus that causes cold sores. This virus is carried by many people. Most people get this infection early in childhood. Once infected, people carry the virus forever. It may flare up as cold sores repeatedly. The first infection of this virus may go unnoticed. When it causes symptoms of sore mouth and gums, it is called gingivostomatitis.

SYMPTOMS

The symptoms of this infection can be mild or severe. They include:

- Small sores and blisters in the mouth, tongue, gums, throat and on the lips.
- Swelling of the gums.
- Severe mouth pain.
- Bleeding gums.
- Irritability from pain.
- Decreased appetite or refusal to eat or drink.
- Drooling.
- Bad breath.
- High fever.
- Swollen tender lymph nodes (*glands*) on the sides of the neck.
- Headache.
- General discomfort, uneasiness, or ill feeling.

Symptoms may last for 1 to 2 weeks.

DIAGNOSIS

Diagnosis of gingivostomatitis is usually made by a physical exam. Sometimes the sores are tested for the HSV virus.

TREATMENT

This infection goes away on its own. Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, and or fever, as directed by your caregiver. Sometimes a medicine to treat the herpes virus is used to help shorten the illness. Medicated mouth rinses can help with the mouth pain.

HOME CARE

Several things can be done at home to help with this infection:

- Keep the mouth and teeth clean. Use gentle brushing. If this is too painful, wipe the teeth with a wet washcloth. Bleeding of the gums may occur.
- Infants should continue with breast milk or formula.
- Offer soft and cold foods to older infants and children. Ice cream, Jell-O and yogurt work well.
- Offer plenty of liquids to prevent dehydration. Popsicles and cool non-citrus juice may be soothing.

To prevent the spread of this virus:

- Keep your child away from others, especially infants and patients on cancer medications.
- Wash your hands well after handling children that are infected.
- Infected children should keep their hands away from their mouth. They should avoid rubbing their eyes. They should wash their hands often.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Your child is refusing to drink or take fluids
- Fever comes back after being gone for a day or two

- The pain is severe and is not controlled with medications.
- Your child is getting worse.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Your child has signs of herpes infection of the eye:
  - Pain and redness to the eye.
  - Decreased or blurred vision.
  - Pain with light.
  - Tearing or drainage from the eye.
- Your child shows signs of dehydration:
  - Unusual fussiness, weakness or fatigue.
  - Not urinating at least once in every 8 hours.
  - No tears when crying.
  - Dry mouth.

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