The Nature of the Condition

Herpes stomatitis is a viral infection of the mouth which causes blisters and ulcers. It is a contagious infection caused by the herpes simplex virus. It is possible that an adult member of the family may have a cold sore at the time the child develops herpes stomatitis but often no cause of infection is found.

Symptoms

- A temperature which may be noticed 1 – 2 days before the blisters appear
- Blisters in and around the mouth
- Ulcers inside the mouth
- Swollen gums
- Pain in mouth
- Drooling
- Difficulty swallowing

Sometimes children with herpes stomatitis need to be admitted to hospital for a few days. Your child will be nursed in a cubicle on the ward as this is a contagious infection. You will need to wash and dry your hands before and after handling your child.

Our Usual Form of Treatment

Herpes stomatitis can be treated with Acyclovir: also called Zovirax, this is an antiviral medication (if this is needed this will be prescribed by your doctor). Your child may also be given a spray called Difflam which is sprayed into the mouth and has a numbing effect. This spray can be used frequently especially before eating and drinking. Your child may be reluctant to drink due to the pain and discomfort so they need to be encouraged to have small amounts more often. Cool drinks such as milk or milkshakes may be soothing to the mouth but avoid fizzy drinks as these will make the sores hurt. It may also be easier for your child to drink through a straw.

If your child is unable to drink they may receive fluid through a drip until they are able to drink again. Your child will also be given regular Paracetamol, Calpol or Disprol to help with the pain.

Benefits of Treatment

The infection should completely clear up within 10 days, this is sometimes speeded up when acyclovir is given.

Complications

Dehydration may occur if your child is unable to drink due to a sore mouth. Signs of dehydration are:

- Dry mouth and lips
- Not passing urine or less wet nappies
- The soft spot on the head may be sunken (in babies)
- Eyes appear sunken
- More sleepy than usual

Discomforts of Treatment

Your child may not want to take medicine or use the Difflam spray as this may be painful for them. They need to be encouraged to do this as it will help to relieve the pain.

Prevention

It has been estimated that about 90% of the population carry the herpes simplex virus so it is difficult to prevent children from picking it up. Adults with active cold sores should avoid kissing anyone especially children and babies, and should avoid sharing utensils, glasses etc.

Once someone has had the herpes simplex virus it never completely disappears and can reoccur as cold sores.