

Mouth ulcers or blisters are common in young children. There are three main culprits that cause mouth ulcers.

1. Primary Herpetic Gingivostomatitis.

Truly a mouthful, this viral infection usually comes and goes unnoticed before the age of 4. However, 25-30 percent of infected children will develop mouth blisters and ulcerations creating painful swollen gums and sores on the cheeks, palate, and tongue. A child's drool will contain shedding virus, and if there is a break in the child's or caregiver's cuticle, then blisters will show up on the fingers of that hand. This is called Herpetic Whitlow. As with any viral infection, treat for comfort while the virus runs its course. Tylenol and Motrin can help with fever and fussiness, but the child's mouth can be so sore that eating will be difficult. In these situations, a prescription numbing, and soothing rinse can be helpful. This same virus recurs as cold sores later in life for about 20 percent of those exposed as a child. The amino acid Lysine can help prevent these cold sore outbreaks.

2. Aphthous ulcers.

This T-cell (autoimmune) mediated lesion develops in childhood/adolescence and will continue sporadically throughout life. About 10 percent of the population has to endure this type of ulcer that shows up on the cheeks, the floor of the mouth and on the soft palate in the back of the throat. While the exact cause of these lesions are unknown, triggers for outbreak can be stress, fatigue, sudden weight loss, illness, injury, hormonal, food allergies, some toothpastes, and vitamin deficiencies. Aphthous ulcers can be controlled with good oral hygiene, avoiding spicy or acidic foods and mouth rinses or symptomatically treat with dental lasers to stop pain.

3. Hand foot and mouth infection (the Coxsackie A virus).

Children age 2-4 are most susceptible, and this virus can run through day-care groups as it is very contagious. Luckily, most infections are mild and go undetected. Some will have a fever and painful blisters in the mouth, on the palms of the hand, fingers, and soles of the feet. If these blisters and ulcers also occur on the soft palate and tonsillar pillars, then it gets a new name (same virus) ...Herpangina.