HERPES SIMPLEX
(Cold Sores)

What are they?
Cold sores are caused by a type of herpes virus.

What are the symptoms?
The first symptom is often a tingling in the area (usually the mouth or nose) where a blister will appear. The blister will then develop a crust and will heal without scarring. Children who get their first attack can have more widespread blisters and may also have mouth ulcers and fever which makes them feel rather miserable. These blisters will also heal without scarring and if the child has any further attacks they will simply take the form of a cold sore.

Why do cold sores recur?
Once someone has the cold sore virus, it does not completely disappear from the body but becomes dormant, remaining in the skin. Repeat cold sores can be triggered by factors such as sunlight, cold, stress and illness.

Are they infectious?
Yes. They are usually spread by kissing (because the virus is active in the cold sore blister and can be transferred onto another person’s skin during a kiss). People who know they have an active cold sore should avoid kissing young children.

What is the incubation period?
It is usually between 2 and 12 days.

Is there any treatment?
Most cold sores do not need any treatment at all and will heal up quickly on their own. Anaesthetic cream, soothing lotions (eg calamine) and antiviral ointments can be helpful. Some people have frequent recurrences and may receive tablets from their GP to prevent these.

How soon can someone return to school or work?
Most people will not need to take any time off work at all. Children with their first attack can go back to school as they feel well.