



# Self-care Information

## Cold Sores

Tips on how you can self manage cold sores

“Supporting you to look after you”

### Key advice:

- Try to avoid anything that triggers your cold sores.
- Speak to your local pharmacy about over the counter treatments, such as a cream. Use antiviral cream at the first signs of a cold sore.
- Wash your hands before and after applying cream.
- Cold sores are contagious until they go away.
- Try not to kiss anyone whilst you have a cold sore, especially babies.

### What is a cold sore?

- Cold sores are caused by a virus called Herpes Simplex.
- Once you have the virus, it stays in your skin for the rest of your life. Sometimes it causes a cold sore.
- Cold sores are contagious, especially when the blisters burst.
- Some things might trigger a cold sore, such as:
  - ✧ Another illness
  - ✧ Sunshine
  - ✧ During a woman's period



A cold sore usually starts with a tingling, itching or burning feeling.

- Over the next 48 hours small fluid-filled blisters appear.
- The blisters can appear anywhere on the face.
- The blisters burst and crust over into a scab.

A cold sore should start to heal within 10 days. They are contagious, and may be painful whilst they heal.

### Did you know?

You can buy cheaper non-branded alternatives of cold sore treatments from a pharmacy or local supermarket

### Your local pharmacy can advise on suitable treatments, such as:

- Creams to ease pain and irritation.
- Antiviral creams that can speed up healing.
- Cold sore patches to protect the skin while it heals.



You can also buy electronic devices from pharmacies that treat cold sores with light or lasers.

Antiviral creams are best used as soon as you recognise the early tingling feeling. They do not always work after blisters have appeared.



**Let your pharmacist know if you take any other medicines, or if you are pregnant or breastfeeding, as this may affect which treatments you can use safely.**

## You could try

- ✓ Eating cool, soft foods.
- ✓ Using an antiseptic mouthwash if it hurts to brush your teeth.
- ✓ Washing your hands with soap and water before and after applying cream.
- ✓ Avoiding anything that triggers your cold sores.
- ✓ Using sunblock lip balm (SPF 15 or above) if sunshine is the trigger.
- ✓ Taking paracetamol or ibuprofen to ease pain and swelling (liquid paracetamol is available for children)
- ✓ Drinking plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration.



## Try not to

- ✗ Eat acidic or salty food.
- ✗ Touch your cold sore (apart from applying cream).
- ✗ Rub cream into the cold sore – dab it on instead.
- ✗ Kiss anyone while you have a cold sore.
- ✗ Share anything that comes into contact with a cold sore (such as cold sore creams, cutlery or lipstick).
- ✗ Have oral sex until your cold sore completely heals – the cold sore virus also causes genital herpes.



### See your GP or call 111 if:

- The cold sore hasn't started to heal within 10 days.
- You're worried about a cold sore or think it's something else.
- The cold sore is very large or painful.
- You or your child also have swollen, painful gums and sores in the mouth (gingivostomatitis)
- You think it has spread or has made another skin condition worse.
- You're pregnant—there's an increased risk of neonatal herpes.
- You have a weakened immune system – for example, because of chemotherapy or diabetes.

### Here are some useful links to further information

<b>NHS Website</b>	<a href="https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/cold-sores/">https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/cold-sores/</a>
<b>Patient Website</b>	<a href="https://patient.info/childrens-health/viral-skin-infections-leaflet/cold-sores">https://patient.info/childrens-health/viral-skin-infections-leaflet/cold-sores</a>

**Or visit your local pharmacy for advice**

