

Cold Sores

A cold sore usually starts with a tingling, itching or burning feeling, they are common and usually clear up on their own within 10 days. They're contagious until they go away.



Small fluid-filled blisters appear ¹



The blisters can appear anywhere on the face ²



The blisters burst and crust over into a scab ³

How can I avoid triggers/ suggested lifestyle changes

Some people find that certain things trigger a cold sore, such as another illness, sunshine or periods. If you regularly get cold sores, it may be a good idea to keep antiviral cream in your medicine cabinet. As soon as you recognise the early tingling feeling of a cold sore use the antiviral creams as they don't always work after blisters appear.

Why cold sores come back

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. Most people are exposed to the virus when they're young after close contact with someone who has a cold sore. It doesn't usually cause any symptoms until you're older.

How do I treat?

Cold sores take time to heal and they are very contagious, especially when the blisters burst. Don't kiss babies if you have a cold sore. It can lead to neonatal herpes, which is very dangerous to newborn babies.

Do

- eat cool, soft foods
- use an antiseptic mouthwash if it hurts to brush your teeth
- wash your hands with soap and water before and after applying cream
- avoid anything that triggers your cold sores
- use sunblock lip balm (SPF 15 or above) if sunshine is the trigger
- take paracetamol or ibuprofen to ease pain and swelling (liquid paracetamol is available for children) – don't give aspirin to children under 16
- drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration

Don't

- 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

Examples of products available to buy include if applicable

- Aciclovir Cream (also known as Zovirax)

¹ SCIENCE SOURCE/SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY

² PAN XUNBIN/SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY

³ DR P. MARAZZI/SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY

When should I seek advice?

- 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 think it has spread or has made another skin condition worse
- you or your child also have swollen, painful gums and sores in the mouth (gingivostomatitis)
- you're pregnant – there's an increased risk of neonatal herpes
- you have a weakened immune system – for example, because of chemotherapy or diabetes

More information is available at the following website

- NHS website - www.nhs.uk
- Or visit your local pharmacy for advice

The 'Be self-care aware' campaign was created by NHS Derby and Derbyshire Clinical Commissioning Group and is reproduced here with their kind permission.