



Cold Sores

You have been given this leaflet because you have asked for cold sore treatment that you can get “over the counter” (OTC) from pharmacies, supermarkets and some other shops. After a local and national public consultation on OTC medicines, we do not prescribe simple cold sore treatment anymore. A cold sore is a common condition and usually clears up within 10 days.

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.

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 if applicable

- Aciclovir cream

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 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

For more information

- Visit your local pharmacy for advice

Find out more about self-care at www.nhs.uk

Be self-care aware