

# COLD SORES



Cold sores are small blisters that develop on your lips or around your mouth. They are caused by the herpes simplex virus. The blisters usually clear up without treatment within 7 to 10 days.

Cold sores often start with a tingly, itchy or burning feeling around your mouth. Then small, fluid-filled blisters appear which usually scab over by themselves and heal without leaving scars.

After you've had a cold sore, the herpes simplex virus will stay inactive (dormant) for most of the time. However, the virus can be reactivated by certain triggers such as colds and flu, fever, sunlight, tiredness, injury, having your period, or being upset or stressed. Then you will develop cold sores again. Some people have cold sores often. Other people may only get them once.

## How can I treat my cold sores?

Cold sores will usually heal by themselves within 7 to 10 days.

You can buy an antiviral cream from your pharmacy. Antiviral creams probably won't make your cold sores heal faster or hurt less. For it to work, you need to start using the cream before your cold sores appear, as soon as you feel the warning signs of tingling, itching or burning around your mouth. Antiviral creams don't stop cold sores from coming back.

If you do decide to put an antiviral cream on your cold sores:

- wash your hands with soap and water before and after touching your cold sores
- dab the cream on carefully; don't rub it in
- don't share your cream with other people.

## What else can help?

- It's easy to spread the herpes simplex virus to other areas of your skin, or to your eyes, so avoid touching your cold sores. If you do touch them, then wash your hands with soap and water.
- If you wear contact lenses, wash your hands before touching them.
- Drink plenty of water to stay hydrated, even if drinking may be a little painful.
- Eat cool, soft foods and avoid acidic or salty foods.
- If sunlight triggers your cold sores, a sun block lip balm (SPF 15 or higher) could help.

## Do I need to see my doctor?

See your doctor if:

- you are having treatment for cancer or you have a weakened immune system from cancer therapy, steroid therapy or other medicines or conditions
- your newborn baby has cold sores
- you often have cold sores (more than 6 times a year)
- your cold sores aren't getting any better after 5 to 7 days
- your cold sores are spreading to other areas of your skin
- new cold sores are appearing after the first batch
- you have a high temperature that won't go down
- you can't eat or drink.

## Can I give cold sores to other people?

Yes, cold sore blisters are full of virus before they heal so it's easy to pass the infection to other people.

You should avoid:

- kissing, and oral sex, until all your cold sores are completely healed
- sharing lipsticks, cutlery or anything else that may have been in contact with your cold sores.

Be particularly careful around newborn babies, pregnant women, and anyone who has a weakened immune system from cancer therapy, steroid therapy or other medicines or conditions. The infection may be worse in these people.

## Where can I find further information?

NHS Direct Wales: [www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk)

NHS Direct Wales Tel: 0845 4647 (open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

Calls from landlines and mobiles cost 2p per minute, in addition to telephone providers access charge.