



COLD SORES

Cold sores are caused by the *Herpes simplex* virus (HSV). About 40% of Australians are affected by cold sores at some time in their lives. There are two types of HSV and each affects different parts of the body. HSV-1 usually causes infections on the face, such as cold sores around the lips and nose; HSV-2 usually causes genital herpes.

Signs and symptoms

There are four main stages of cold sore symptoms:

- **Tingle** – a tingling, burning feeling around the lips or nose a few hours before the cold sore appears.
- **Blister** – red, swollen areas appear and get covered with tiny blisters. This takes about a day. The blisters can last for a few days.
- **Weeping** – the blisters open and fluid weeps out. The virus can easily be spread to other people at this stage.
- **Scab** – the cold sore dries up and forms a scab. This heals in about a week without leaving a scar.

Cold sores return anytime after the first infection, because the virus 'hides' in the body's nerve cells away from the immune system.

The virus return can be triggered by sunburn, fever, menstrual cycle, cold, illness, some foods, stress, or by being run down.

There is no permanent cure for cold sores, but staying healthy may help reduce the number you get.

Medicines

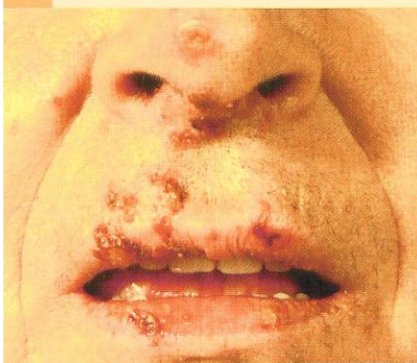
There is a range of cold sore medication available. Talk to your pharmacist about the right one for you.

Antiviral medicines

(*aciclovir, idoxuridine*)

These fight the cold sore virus. They are the most effective treatments available.

- They need to be applied regularly from the tingle stage.
- If applied early enough, these medicines can reduce the chance of a cold sore appearing.



Picture courtesy of Department of Dermatology, St Vincent's Hospital, Melbourne.

IMPORTANT

HSV can be passed on to other people from the time you first feel a tingle until the blisters have healed.

Although HSV-1 usually only causes cold sores, to avoid the risk of developing genital herpes, contact of lips with the genital area should be avoided until the cold sores have completely cleared.

HSV can be dangerous for babies, people with eczema, or people on medications that affect their immune system (ask your doctor or pharmacist).

HSV can also be dangerous if it gets into the eye. If your eyes become red, watery and sensitive to light, see your doctor at once.

- If a cold sore does form, continual use of antiviral medicines (before the blister weeps) can also speed healing.

There are other cold sore products to dry up the blisters, relieve pain and stop possible infection with bacteria. Cold sore products containing povidone-iodine can kill bacteria as well as HSV. They are very useful once a cold sore has reached the weeping stage, when a bacterial infection is more likely to occur.

Self Care

- If blisters have opened, keep the area clean and dry.
- Follow the instructions carefully when using cold sore products.
- Avoid getting cold sore products in the eyes or inside the nose or mouth.
- Wash your hands before and after applying a cold sore product.
- Wear a wide brimmed hat and at least SPF 15+ lip sunscreen when in the sun.
- Eat a well-balanced nutritious diet (see *Nutrition* Fact Card).
- Learn to relax (see *Relaxation Techniques* Fact Card).
- Get plenty of sleep (see *Sleeping Problems* Fact Card).
- Lysine, zinc, and vitamin C may help (ask a pharmacist or doctor).



- Exercise regularly (see *Exercise* fact cards).
- Avoid picking a cold sore at the scab stage – this will delay healing and may open the cold sore up to infection with bacteria.

Stop cold sores spreading

- Avoid other people touching your cold sore (e.g. kissing) especially when your cold sores are in the blister or weeping stage.
- Be careful not to rub your eyes after touching a cold sore.
- Do not share eating and drinking utensils, towels or face cloths while you have cold sores.

Other relevant fact cards

- *Sleeping Problems*
- *Relaxation Techniques*
- *Exercise* series
- *Nutrition* series

Contact

A doctor – listed under ‘medical practitioners’ in the yellow pages of the phone book.

A Self Care Pharmacist. To find: ACT (02) 6283 4777

In case of poisoning phone the **Poisons Information Centre** on 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

Pharmacists are medicines experts.

Ask your pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.



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Your **Self Care** Pharmacist

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The information in this card was current at time of printing.*

