

Help I think I have a cold sore!! Does that mean I have herpes??

Cold sores ARE caused by the herpes simplex virus. However, there are 2 (two) types of herpes virus; HSV-1, which typically causes infection in or around the mouth and nose, and HSV-2, which usually causes genital herpes. However, it is important to note that it is possible for both type 1 and type 2 to cause sores in the genital area.

Cold sores affect a large amount of the population, with over 75% of adults have been exposed to the virus at some time in their life. However, only one-third of infected people experience cold sores!

Most people suffering with a cold sore will visit their local pharmacy for advice. This information leaflet will give you some understanding of this condition, how it occurs, what it looks like and most importantly, how to treat it effectively. One of the most important things to remember with cold sores is that "time is of the essence!" The faster you start treating a cold sore with an antiviral tablet/cream, the better it will respond. Please don't leave your cold sores for several days before visiting the pharmacy; if in doubt, check it out!

How do I know if I have a Cold Sore? What do they feel and look like?

The cold sore infection has four main stages:

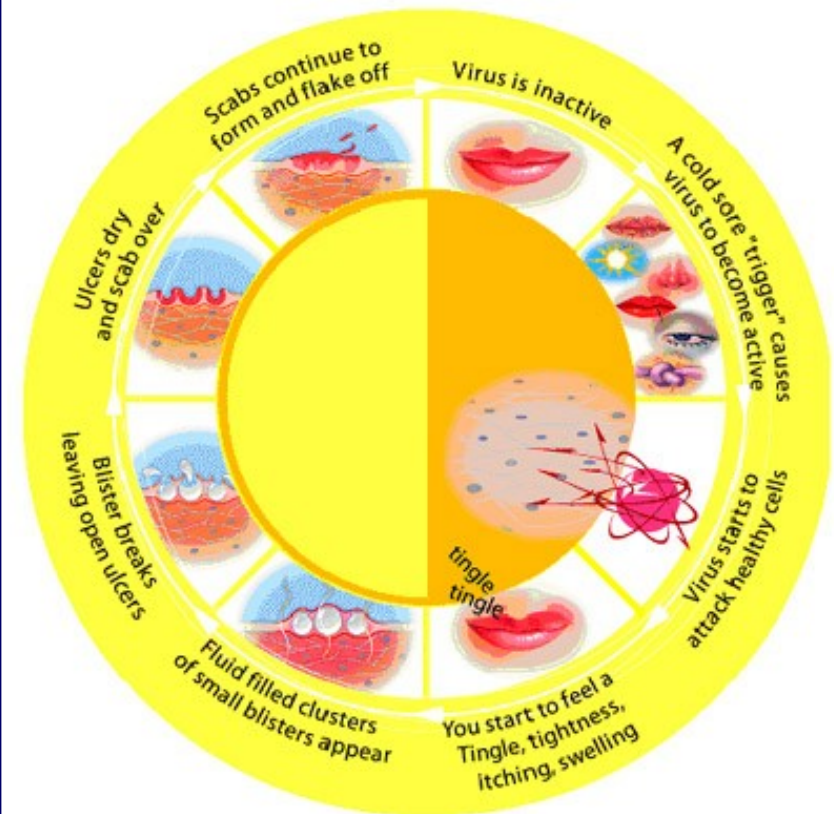
1. **Tingle** (prodromal stage) - most people experience localised itching and tingling a day or two before the cold sore appears.
2. **Blister**—a collection of small blisters form; these may be accompanied by pain, tenderness and a sensation of heat and burning.
3. **Weeping**—these blisters burst after a few days.
4. **Scab**—the crust of the burst blisters dries up and eventually falls off after about 10 days. This leaves pink skin behind and does not generally leave a scar.

Please refer to the diagram on the right showing the common life cycle of a cold sore →

Please see below for pictures showing what a "typical" cold sore may look like:



Life Cycle of the Cold Sore



Who is at risk and how do you catch them?

As previously discussed, the cold sore is caused by a virus; most commonly, the Herpes Simplex Virus or HSV-1. This virus is extremely contagious, with the primary/first infection commonly transmitted by contact such as kissing the infected person or sharing eating utensils (*important to note a person may still be infective AFTER their cold sore has "cleared up" through transmission of saliva*). This primary/first infection with the virus may cause symptoms such as fever, tiredness, swollen neck glands, swelling, blisters/ulcers in and around the mouth and a sore throat. *Once a person is infected with the virus, it may then lie dormant in their body for years, sometimes WITHOUT causing any symptoms. It is only when a "trigger" event occurs that these common cold sore symptoms actually present.*



Some of the most common cold sore triggers include:

- Emotional or physical stress
- Lowered immune status
- Exposure to cold or windy conditions
- Sunburn
- Hormonal changes, such as the menstrual period
- Feverish illnesses, like the flu or a chest infection

Treatment Options

Cold sores are generally not dangerous and do not cause any permanent damage to the skin. It is also important to note that treatment will not "cure" the condition, but will treat the symptoms and may shorten the duration of the "flare up."

• Aciclovir Cream—e.g. Zovirax, Chemist's Own Cold Sore Cream

- These should be applied at the first signs of a cold sore (the "tingle" stage) to help limit the attack and speed up healing. They work as an "anti-viral" fighting the herpes virus to help stop it replicating and growing. Apply 5 times a day (every 4 hours while awake) for 4-5 days. This is the preferred method of treatment as long as it is applied at the first sign of the lesion.



• Idoxuridine with lignocaine—e.g. Virasolve

- Apply at first sign of cold sore—apply a thin layer to the affected area every hour on the first day, then every 4 hours until cold sore disappears. Provides good pain relief with the use of lignocaine (local anaesthetic) and keeps the lesion moist; however, please note idoxuridine has not been proven to be effective in treating the virus.



• Povidone Iodine Ointment—e.g. Betadine Cold Sore Ointment

- This may be applied at any stage in the cold sore cycle. This ointment may help to inactivate the virus and also reduce the spread of HSV-1 infection. Note: this product is not suitable if you have an iodine allergy.
- Apply liberally to the affected area at least 4 times a day.



• Protective lip balms—e.g. Carmex, Blistex, Nyal Cold Sore Cream

- These often contain menthol and camphor, and act with analgesic and antiseptic qualities. They also help to keep the lesion moisturised and avoid cracking/splitting of the scab while it is in the healing stage. Do not let your cold sore dry out, as it will take longer to heal!!!



• L-Lysine, Zinc and Vitamin C supplements—e.g. Ethical Nutrients Lysine Viral Cold Sore Defence, Blackmores Lyp-Sine Tablets

- These supplements may help to reduce the frequency and severity of outbreaks of cold sores. They also act as nutritional support for a normal, healthy immune function.



• Cold sore healing patches—e.g. Compeed

- These patches hide and protect the cold sore, reducing symptoms and the risk of contamination from the wound.



• Herbal/natural applications—e.g. Dynamiclear

- Dynamiclear contains natural plant and mineral ingredients and is marketed as a single application liquid gel. Please note the evidence for this treatment is very limited.



• Pharmacist-Only antiviral tablets—e.g. Famvir, Favic

- These medicines help to fight the virus and are used in people with severe and/or recurrent break-outs. Please note they are very effective; however, only work in the early stages of the virus outbreak—consult your pharmacist for further advice—they are available over-the-counter without prescription and are by far the most effective treatment for cold sores if used in the first 72 hours!

When to consult your pharmacist

Cold sores are usually a self-limiting condition; however, there are always exceptions to the rule and it important for you to know when to consult your pharmacist. Here are some example situations that should lead to a discussion with the pharmacist:

- There is any irritation around or in the eyes (as it is possible for infection to affect the eyes and these people require prompt medical referral).
- You develop chills or a high fever
- The sores showed no signs of tingling, blisters or mild pain (as this may mean the person is suffering from a different condition).
- The sores are VERY painful (as the person's outbreak may be in the form of shingles which requires medical attention).
- The person suffering is a young child or infant.
- The person has already tried another product with little/no success.
- The person suffers with eczema (as they are susceptible to more wide-spread infections and other complications).
- In pregnancy and breastfeeding:
 - Idoxuridine (Virasolve) and acyclovir (Zovirax) should not be used in pregnant women.
 - Idoxuridine (Virasolve) is not recommended for use by breastfeeding mothers. Aciclovir (Zovirax) is considered safe (as long as the infant is not renally impaired).
 - Povidone iodine should only be recommended by a pharmacist and for limited use (small area/short period) during pregnancy and lactation to avoid excessive absorption of iodine.

A Little on LYSINE

*Lysine is an essential amino acid—that is, a product that is essential for human health, but **THE BODY CANNOT MANUFACTURE IT**; i.e. you have to get lysine from food or supplements. Most people get enough lysine from their diet; however, athletes, vegans who don't eat beans, as well as burn patients may need more. Not consuming enough lysine may lead to fatigue, nausea, dizziness, loss of appetite, anaemia and reproductive disorders, to name just a few.*

So why does my pharmacist recommend lysine to people suffering with cold sores?

There have been some studies showing that taking lysine on a regular basis may help to reduce occurrence, severity and healing time for recurrent cold sore infections. This is believed to be due to the antiviral effects of lysine, which works by blocking the activity of another amino acid called arginine. This is important, as arginine is needed to promote replication of the Herpes Simplex Virus responsible for the cold sore symptoms.

What dose should you take?

*The general dosage range is between 1000-3000mg daily (reserving the higher end of this dosage for more severe infection). Please note these doses are a general guide only and are indicated for **ADULTS**. Please consult your pharmacist!*

Is there any cautionary advice I should be aware of?

Caution should be exercised in people with any hepatic (liver) or renal (kidney) dysfunction. Also not recommended in pregnancy and breastfeeding—consult your pharmacist!

Here are some examples of products containing lysine that may be stocked in your pharmacy—please note that some of these products also contain zinc, and vitamin C to further assist in the skin's healing process.



Frequently Asked Questions

1. How do I prevent a cold sore outbreak?

- Avoid any known triggers, if possible.
- Try to stay healthy by eating healthy food, getting enough exercise and sleeping well.
- Try to manage your stress levels and avoid getting ill or run down.
- Don't share towels, face cloths, cups, cutlery or razors with other people.
- Don't kiss someone with a cold sore!
- Try to avoid getting sunburnt on your face and lips—SLIP SLOP SLAP WRAP!
- If you are known to suffer with cold sores, have an antiviral treatment ready; either a cream available over-the-counter or an oral tablet that you can obtain from the pharmacy; ensure you are ready to treat right from the very first TINGLE.

2. What else can I do when I get a cold sore? I want to get better FAST and I DON'T want to pass this on to anybody else!

- Avoid arginine rich foods (e.g. High protein shakes, chocolate, nuts and seeds).
- Keep the area moist with an ointment.
- Try not to scratch or rub the sore. This could cause a secondary bacterial infection, making your symptoms WORSE.
- Avoid passing on the virus through kissing, sharing eating utensils, razors, towels etc.
- Wash your hands before touching another person or any other part of your own body, especially the eyes and the genitals (which are most likely to be affected by this virus).



Products available for Optimal Care

What other products can I get from my LiveLife pharmacy to ensure I am caring properly for my cold sores?

- Lysine supplements—to help fight the virus (as discussed on page 3).
- Antiviral/immune strengthening herbs such as Olive leaf, Echinacea and Andrographis. *Please note that olive leaf should not be taken at the same time as a Lysine supplement, as it can interfere with amino acid metabolism—take these supplements at least 3 hours apart.* E.g. Ethical Nutrients Immune Defence, Swisse Immune Tablets.
- Nail scissors—to keep those nails short and prevent scratching!
- Protective lip balm—to stop the area drying out and cracking.
- Self care fact card—so you remember all of the fantastic information you have been provided!
- Sunscreen—in order to prevent burning, and thus increased risk of further break-outs.

