

Cold Sores

What is a cold sore?

A cold sore is a small, painful raised area of small, fluid-filled blisters, found on the lips, on the nose or around the mouth. The blisters are painful and dry up to make a yellow crust which gradually heals in a few days. The virus that causes them, Herpes Simplex, can also affect your hands, eyes and genitals. Cold sores tend to last 5 to 7 days and can keep coming back.

Are they infectious?

Yes. Cold sores are infectious from when they start, with a tingling sensation until they are fully healed. The virus can be passed to other people by close contact such as kissing. It is important to try and avoid touching cold sores as you can pass the virus on to other people's hands, to your own hands, eyes or genitals. Avoid squeezing, pinching or picking the cold sore as this can spread the infection.

Can they be treated?

Yes, you can get aciclovir over the counter at a pharmacy. This will ease the pain and blistering and help the sores heal more quickly. You should apply these creams as early as possible when the cold sore starts to develop and should be applied regularly.

I have a cold sore but am due to see my dentist. Will they still be able to treat me?

No. The latest guidelines for dental professionals are not to treat patients with cold sores because of the risk to their own health and yours.

Cold sores are contagious at all stages and the nature of dentistry means that the virus can be transmitted to you, the dentist or the nurse in the air through as their equipment creates aerosols. Even a check-up can cause this because of their air syringe. If the cold sore virus gets into eyes it can lead to serious complications and blindness. The cold sore may also be painful for you as if it cracks or bleeds during treatment.

If you have an appointment but have a cold sore you should call your dentist to rearrange your appointment.