

Self Care Briefing for Clinicians: Infrequent Cold Sores of the Lip

Summary

- Cold sores caused by the herpes simplex virus usually clear up without treatment within 7 to 10 days.
- Antiviral creams are available over-the-counter from pharmacies without a prescription and if used correctly, these can help ease symptoms and speed up the healing time.
- To be effective, these treatments should be applied as soon as the first signs of a cold sore appear. Using an antiviral cream after this initial period is unlikely to have much of an effect.

Recommendations for clinicians

- Provide the patient with a 'non-prescription' sheet or a patient information leaflet to promote education about self-limiting conditions suitable for self care when appropriate.
- Advise patients of safe and effective self care measures:
 - Eat cool, soft foods and drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration.
 - Use an antiseptic mouthwash if it hurts to brush your teeth.
 - Avoid triggers and use lip balm (SPF 15 or above) if sunshine is a trigger.
 - Avoid rubbing antiviral creams into cold sore, dab cream on instead. Wash hands before and after applying cream.
- Advise patients to seek medical attention and consider treatment with a prescription in the following circumstances:
 - If the cold sore has not started to heal within 10 days.
 - If pregnant – there's an increased risk of neonatal herpes.
 - Have a weakened immune system – for example, because of chemotherapy or diabetes.
 - Swollen, painful gums and sores in the mouth (gingivostomatitis) - patient to seek dental advice.

Examples of over-the-counter products available to buy

Please advise patients that suggested prices are, a guide, correct at the time of writing and are subject to change.

- Aciclovir cream: Licensed for adults and children (£4.00-£6.00 for 2g).

Further information

- [Selfcare forum](#)
- [NHS.uk](#)
- [Patient UK](#)

Document History

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