

## Cold sores – you can't kiss them better

Around the time of Valentines Day our thoughts might sometimes turn to romance; not quite so likely, perhaps, if you're afflicted with a cold sore.

To most people cold sores might seem to be a comparatively trivial condition; but if you are one of the thousands of people who suffer with cold sores you no doubt find them annoying beyond belief.

Your friends and family probably won't find them all that appealing either; a fact confirmed by a survey conducted a few years ago by one of the pharmaceutical companies involved with the marketing of a cold sore relief cream. Cold sores were shown to be more off-putting than tinea, dandruff or even bad breath!

In this warm summer weather, cold sores will be more common. Dry, burnt lips present the ideal conditions for a cold sore to break out.

Nevertheless, there are effective products to treat cold sores and some excellent information from your local pharmacy on how to prevent them from occurring.

Pharmacies which provide the Pharmaceutical Society's Self Care health information have a recently up-dated Fact Card on cold sores. It tells you all you need to know, and more, about these annoying little skin infections - what cold sores are, how they occur, what medicines help and how best to use them.

Cold sores are caused by one of the viruses from the herpes family, known as herpes simplex (HSV). There are two types of HSV infections. HSV-1 usually causes infections on the face, such as cold sores around the lips and nose, whereas HSV-2 usually causes genital herpes.

Unfortunately, cold sores come back time after time because, as with all the herpes infections, the virus "hides" in the nerve cells in the skin at or near the original site. A range of triggers can then reactivate the virus to cause another cold sore – as well as sunburn, other triggers can include cold weather, fever, illness, and fatigue; in fact just about anything that puts our immune system under some stress.

There are formulations containing so-called immune system boosters: ascorbic acid, zinc and the amino acid lysine; but there is little evidence to support the use of other herbal or vitamin products in the prevention and treatment of cold sores.

We are all exposed to the cold sore virus. Not all of us, however, will experience an outbreak of cold sores; but if you do get cold sores, then you're in good company. You're one of more than 4 million Australians – over 20% of our population – who report having repeated attacks.

Mild and occasional cases of cold sores can be treated with anaesthetic and analgesic ointments, creams and lotions. Topical antiviral preparations containing acyclovir or penciclovir will help if applied frequently and from the first sign of the lesion – that is when the itch or tingle is first noticed. Severe or recurrent cold sores respond well to oral antiviral medications which are currently available as prescription products.

Cold sores are easily transferred from person to person, and they can be particularly dangerous if caught by babies or people taking medicine that affects their immune system. Cold sores are not the kind of condition that you can kiss better – kissing's a sure fire way of spreading them around. In fact kissing's probably very much off the agenda anyway. With cold sores you're almost certain to get the cold shoulder as well.

There may be no permanent cure for cold sores, at least not yet; but you need to know how best to prevent them and how best to treat them when they do occur – so your social life won't become "no social life at all".

Phone the Pharmaceutical Society (PSA) on 1300 369 772 or visit the website [www.psa.org.au](http://www.psa.org.au) to find the nearest pharmacy providing the *Cold Sore* Fact Card and have a talk with your pharmacist.