
What is Impetigo?

Impetigo is a skin infection. It is usually caused by one of two bacteria (germs):

- ❖ *Staphylococcus aureus*
- ❖ *Streptococcus* Group A

Both are often found in the environment and on the surface of most people's skin. If you pick at sores or scratch itchy bites, you may cause bacteria to enter your skin and cause impetigo. Preschool and school age children are most affected.

It is more common in the summer when the skin tends to get broken by cuts and insect bites. Eczema and other skin problems can encourage it to develop. It can take from 1 to 10 days for symptoms to appear.

What are the symptoms?

The skin anywhere on the body can be affected but it is more common around the hands, nose and mouth. Blisters form and over the next 4-6 days will burst, ooze fluid, and develop a honey-colour crust.

Can it be serious?

Problems arise if the bacteria invade beyond the skin. This is very rare. Some of the organisms causing impetigo are more dangerous than others. *Streptococcus pyogenes*, can cause damage to the kidneys or heart. It can also affect other major organs.

How does it spread?

It can be spread around the body by scratching the itchy skin. Impetigo can be most easily passed on to others when the skin is weeping. The infection can spread to other people on clothing, towels, and bed linens that have touched the person's infected skin. It can also be spread among friends and classmates who touch the weepy sores on the skin.

What action is needed?

- ❖ Clean all sores and bites with antibacterial soap and water
- ❖ Don't scratch or pick
- ❖ Cover infected areas of skin, if possible, with gauze and tape or a loose plastic bandage. This will help to keep your child from spreading impetigo to other parts of the body
- ❖ Fingernails should be kept short
- ❖ Keep the child's bed linens, towels, and clothing separate from those of other family members, and wash these items in hot water
- ❖ If your child is unwell or has new sores or blisters it is advised that they do not attend school, nursery, playgroup or other childcare facility. Once they are feeling better and the spots are healing they can return
- ❖ If the doctor has prescribed antibiotics they should not return until they have been on them for at least 2 days

Is treatment needed?

Impetigo is usually treated with antiseptic ointment. It is important that the instructions are properly followed.

- ❖ Make sure that hands are washed with warm, soapy water after applying any ointment
- ❖ It may be helpful to daily gently wash areas of infected skin with clean gauze and antiseptic soap (available from any pharmacy)
- ❖ It is important to keep your skin clean and dry and avoid any further injury
- ❖ If the rash spreads, becomes more painful, or worsens in any other way, contact your GP

In severe cases where the impetigo has spread to many areas of the body, or the ointment isn't working the doctor may prescribe an antibiotic pill or liquid.

It can take up to 10 days for the skin to heal properly. The colour may not return to normal for some time after this.

Impetigo is easy to treat and rarely causes any complications.

Need further advice or information?

- ❖ NHS Inform www.nhsinform.co.uk
- ❖ NHS24 ☎ 111 www.nhs24.co.uk
- ❖ www.nhsborders.scot.nhs.uk
- ❖ Local health clinic or GP

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NHS Borders on 01896 825522 or email equality@borders.scot.nhs.uk

Produced by: Public Health Dept, NHS Borders, Education Centre, Borders General Hospital, Melrose, TD6 9BD, 01896 825560

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