



Weill Cornell Medical College

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Patient Education:

# Impetigo, Pediatric

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# Impetigo, Pediatric

Impetigo is an infection of the skin. It is most common in babies and children. The infection causes blisters on the skin. The blisters usually occur on the face but can also affect other areas of the body. Impetigo usually goes away in 7–10 days with treatment.

## CAUSES

Impetigo is caused by two types of bacteria. It may be caused by staphylococci or streptococci bacteria. These bacteria cause impetigo when they get under the surface of the skin. This often happens after some damage to the skin, such as damage from:

- Cuts, scrapes, or scratches.
- Insect bites, especially when children scratch the area of a bite.
- Chickenpox.
- Nail biting or chewing.

Impetigo is contagious and can spread easily from one person to another. This may occur through close skin contact or by sharing towels, clothing, or other items with a person who has the infection.

## RISK FACTORS

Babies and young children are most at risk of getting impetigo. Some things that can increase the risk of getting this infection include:

- Being in school or day care settings that are crowded.
- Playing sports that involve close contact with other children.
- Having broken skin, such as from a cut.

## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Impetigo usually starts out as small blisters, often on the face. The blisters then break open and turn into tiny sores (*lesions*) with a yellow crust. In some cases, the blisters cause itching or burning. With scratching, irritation, or lack of treatment, these small areas may get larger. Scratching can also cause impetigo to spread to other parts of the body. The bacteria can get under the fingernails and spread when the child touches another area of his or her skin.

Other possible symptoms include:

- Larger blisters.
- Pus.
- Swollen lymph glands.

## DIAGNOSIS

The health care provider can usually diagnose impetigo by performing a physical exam. A skin sample or sample of fluid from a blister may be taken for lab tests that involve growing bacteria (*culture test*). This can help confirm the diagnosis or help determine the best treatment.

## TREATMENT

Mild impetigo can be treated with prescription antibiotic cream. Oral antibiotic medicine may be used in more severe cases. Medicines for itching may also be used.

## HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Give medicines only as directed by your child's health care provider.
- To help prevent impetigo from spreading to other body areas:
  - Keep your child's fingernails short and clean.
  - Make sure your child avoids scratching.
  - Cover infected areas if necessary to keep your child from scratching.
- Gently wash the infected areas with antibiotic soap and water.
- Soak crusted areas in warm, soapy water using antibiotic soap.
  - Gently rub the areas to remove crusts. **Do not** scrub.
- Wash your hands and your child's hands often to avoid spreading this infection.
- Keep your child home from school or day care until he or she has used an antibiotic cream for 48 hours (2 days) or an oral antibiotic medicine for 24 hours (1 day). Also, your child should only return to school or day care if his or her skin shows significant improvement.

## PREVENTION

To keep the infection from spreading:

- Keep your child home until he or she has used an antibiotic cream for 48 hours or an oral antibiotic for 24 hours.
- Wash your hands and your child's hands often.
- **Do not** allow your child to have close contact with other people while he or she still has blisters.
- **Do not** let other people share your child's towels, washcloths, or bedding while he or she has the infection.

## SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Your child develops more blisters or sores despite treatment.
- Other family members get sores.
- Your child's skin sores are not improving after 48 hours of treatment.
- Your child has a fever.
- Your baby who is younger than 3 months has a fever lower than 100°F (38°C).

## SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You see spreading redness or swelling of the skin around your child's sores.
- You see red streaks coming from your child's sores.
- Your baby who is younger than 3 months has a fever of 100°F (38°C) or higher.
- Your child develops a sore throat.

- Your child is acting ill (lethargic, sick to his or her stomach).

## **MAKE SURE YOU:**

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your child's condition.
- Will get help right away if your child is not doing well or gets worse.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.

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