

Impetigo (Infected Sores)

What is impetigo?

Impetigo is an infection of the skin. Any wound that doesn't heal, or a wound that increases in size, usually has become infected. The infected sores:

- are less than 1 inch in diameter
- start as small red bumps, which rapidly change to cloudy blisters, then pimples, and finally sores
- are often covered by a soft, yellow-brown scab
- may be draining pus.

Impetigo often spreads and the sores increase in number from scratching and picking at the initial sore.

What is the cause?

Impetigo is caused by Streptococcus bacteria or Staphylococcus bacteria. It is more common in the summertime when the skin is often broken by cuts, scrapes, and insect bites. When caused by a strep infection of the nose, the impetigo usually first appears near the nose or mouth.

How long does it last?

With proper treatment, the skin will be completely healed in 1 week. Some blemishes will remain for 6 to 12 months, but scars are unusual unless your child repeatedly picks his sores. The sores are not contagious if they are covered, or after your child has taken an antibiotic for 24 hours.

How can I take care of my child?

- **Antibiotic ointment** The child must be seen in the office first to confirm diagnosis before an antibiotic will be prescribed. Before you first apply the antibiotic ointment, remove the scab. Apply the antibiotic ointment to the raw surface 3 times a day. You don't need a prescription for the ointment. Cover the sores with a Band-Aid to prevent scratching and spread. Apply the ointment for 7 days, or longer if necessary. The area should be washed off with an antibacterial soap each time before you apply the ointment. Any new crust that forms should not be removed because this delays healing.
- **Removing the scabs** The bacteria live underneath the soft scabs, and until these are removed, the antibiotic ointment has difficulty getting through to the bacteria to kill them. Soak the area for 15 to 20 minutes in warm soapy water. Use a liquid antibacterial soap. Then gently remove the crusts. The area may need to be gently rubbed, but it should not be scrubbed. A little bleeding is common if you remove all the crust.
- **Preventing the spread of impetigo to other areas on your child's body** Every time your child touches the impetigo and then scratches another part of the skin with that finger, he can start a new site of impetigo. To prevent this, encourage your child not to touch or pick at the sores. Keep his fingernails cut short, and wash his hands often with one of the antibacterial soaps. Cover the sores with a Band-Aid if they are not on the face. If given a topical antibiotic you can put some of this just inside the nose daily to prevent colonies from forming.
- **Contagiousness to others** Impetigo is quite contagious. Be certain that other people in the family do not use your child's towel or washcloth. It can also be spread by toys and athletic equipment your child handles. Your child should be kept out of school until he has been on treatment for 24 hours with oral antibiotics or 48 hours with antibiotic ointment alone. For mild impetigo treated with an antibiotic ointment, the child can continue to attend day care or school if the sore is covered with a Band-Aid.

When should I call my child's health care provider?

Call IMMEDIATELY if:

- Your child starts to act very sick.

Call within 24 hours if:

- The size and number of sores increase after 48 hours of treatment.
- A fever or a sore throat occurs.
- The impetigo is not completely healed in 1 week.
- You have other questions or concerns.

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