

Impetigo

WHAT IS IT? Impetigo is a superficial bacterial infection of the skin caused by the streptococcus or staphylococcus germs which most often affects children. It is more common in the summer when the skin is often broken by cuts, scrapes or insect bites. These bites or cuts get infected and are then spread by the person scratching the infected sores and then scratching other unaffected areas of the body. The sores may start out as blisters which rupture early, then slowly form crusted lesions which sometimes drain pus.

HOW IS IT SPREAD? Impetigo is quite contagious. You are exposed to the bacteria that cause impetigo when you come into contact with the sores of someone who's infected or with items they've touched, such as clothing, bed linen, towels and even toys.

WHEN IS IT CONTAGIOUS? Impetigo is highly contagious while the infection is active.

HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED AND TREATED? Impetigo is diagnosed usually by the distinctive appearance of the sores and medical history. Many cases of impetigo can be treated by applying an antibiotic ointment directly to the sores for about a week. The sores should be cleansed with soap and water before applying the medication. The antibiotic ointment should be applied 3-4 times a day. Sometimes, however, oral antibiotics may be required in more severe cases. Avoid scratching or touching the sores as much as possible while they heal. With proper treatment the skin should be completely healed in 10 days; however, some discoloration may persist for 6-12 months.

SHOULD THE CHILD STAY HOME? Impetigo is quite contagious. If the sores cannot be covered by dressing, your child should stay home. If treated with antibiotics, the child may usually return to school within 24 hours of starting treatment.

COMPLICATIONS? Call your doctor if:

- Urine becomes red or cola-colored;
- Any large, painful blisters develop;
- The impetigo increases in size and number of sores after 48 hours of treatment;
- A fever, sore throat or painful joint pain occurs;
- You have other concerns or questions.

HOW CAN WE LIMIT THE SPREAD?

- Keeping the skin clean is the best way to keep it healthy.
- Treat cuts, scrapes, insect bites and other wounds right away by washing the affected areas and applying antibiotic ointment to prevent infection.
- Keep your child's fingernails short
- Wash hands often
- Cover broken skin where possible.