

Impetigo

What is Impetigo?

Impetigo is an infection of the skin caused by bacteria. There are two types of bacteria that cause impetigo; staphylococcal or streptococcal bacteria. These bacteria can live on the skin, in the throat, or the nose without causing a problem. Skin that has been damaged is at a higher risk of getting a skin infection. Damaged skin includes scratches, bites, or a disease affecting the skin, such as eczema. Impetigo is most common in children under six years of age.

What are the symptoms?

The infection begins with small blisters that can burst leaving wet patches. These blisters can also leak fluid. In a few days a dark yellow crust will form over the area. Larger blisters can also occur. Blisters can appear anywhere on the body. The most common areas are around the nose and mouth.

How is it spread?

Impetigo is spread through contact with the fluid and crusts of the blisters. The fluid and crusts of the blisters contain bacteria that can infect other people.

- The blisters are itchy, and scratching can spread the infection to other parts of the body.
- Clothing and towels of the infected person can spread impetigo because they have been in contact with their blisters.
- Classmates are at risk of infection by coming in contact with the infected person or anything they have touched. It is important to wash toys.

What to do?

If you suspect impetigo see a doctor right away. The doctor can make a diagnosis by looking at the blisters.

Treatment

Antibiotics are prescribed to treat impetigo and are given by mouth or a cream. It is important that this medication be used exactly as the doctor instructs.

When is it contagious?

Children may return to school or child care when they are no longer contagious. A person infected with impetigo infection is contagious until 24-48 hours of antibiotic treatment has been completed. If antibiotics are not given, the person is contagious until the blisters go away.

Prevention

There is no vaccine or medication that prevents impetigo. You can lower the chance of getting sick by doing the following:

- **Wash your hands.** Handwashing is the best way to prevent the spread of impetigo, especially after contact with an infected person. Frequent hand washing is recommended to decrease the chance of becoming infected.

The six steps to good hand washing are:

1. Wet hands with warm running water.
2. Put liquid soap on hands.
3. Lather hands and scrub for 20 seconds.
4. Rinse under running water.
5. Dry your hands with paper towels.
6. Use the paper towel to turn off the taps.

- **If your hands are not visibly dirty, an alcohol-based hand rub can be added to your hand washing routine:**
 1. Apply the sanitizer to your hands. Use an amount about the size of a dime.
 2. Rub your hands together until the hand rub is gone. Hands will feel dry in about 15 seconds.
- **Avoid contact sports, activities that share equipment and swimming** until the infection has been treated.
- **Avoid sharing personal items such as towels and clothing. Wash these items in hot water and dry in a hot tumble dryer.**
- **Toys can be washed using a mild disinfectant** such as a 1:500 household bleach and water solution (approximately 100 ppm). This can be made by mixing 20 ml (4 teaspoons) household bleach to 10 L (40 cups) water or 1 ml (1/4 teaspoon) household bleach to 500 ml (2 cups) water.
- **Clean and sanitize common use areas.** This is very important for schools and child care centers. Follow the disinfectant manufacturer's instructions carefully, and leave the disinfectant on the surface for the minimum amount of time the label advises.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Infectious Disease Control Team at 519-663-5317 ext. 2330 or go to www.healthunit.com

Reference:

Heymann, D. L. (Ed.). (2015). Streptococcal Diseases. In Control of communicable diseases manual (20th ed.). Washington, DC: American Public Health Association.

Canadian Paediatric Society. (2018). *Impetigo*. Retrieved August 30, 2018, from <https://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/impetigo>.

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