

Impetigo

What is impetigo?

Impetigo is a bacterial infection of the skin caused by either *Staphylococcus aureus* (staph) bacteria, group A *Streptococcus* (strep) bacteria or both. It is more common in children than adults and often occurs in the summer. Impetigo is usually caused when bacteria enter the body through breaks in the skin, such as scrapes, cold sores, insect bites or patches of eczema.

What are the symptoms?

A child with impetigo will have a skin rash that looks like a group of small blisters or red bumps. After these blisters appear they often burst, and fluid seeps out. When the fluid dries, the blisters become coated with a yellow or grey crust. The blistered area will often be surrounded by redness. The rash will spread if not treated.

This rash usually appears around the nose, mouth, and other parts of the face. It can also appear on any skin not covered by clothes, such as arms and legs.

In severe cases of impetigo there may be swelling of the lymph glands in the face or neck, severe pain, worsening redness, weakness and fever. If you or your child has these symptoms, discuss them with your health care provider.

Is impetigo serious?

Impetigo is usually a mild infection. Children with impetigo will have little discomfort other than occasional itching. In rare cases, the bacteria that cause impetigo can get into the bloodstream and cause kidney disease.

How is it spread?

Impetigo is very infectious. It spreads easily from person-to-person through nasal discharge or skin-to-skin contact. For example, when someone touches the rash and then touches another person, the infection can be passed on. Impetigo also spreads by touching objects contaminated with the bacteria. It can take anywhere from 1 to 10 days for the rash to appear after you have been infected.

You should practice good personal hygiene when a family member or someone you know has impetigo. It is very important to wash your hands after touching the rash, as impetigo spreads easily by hand-to-hand contact. For more information, see [HealthLinkBC File #85 Hand washing: Help stop the spread of germs](#).

A child with impetigo should not share towels, clothes, face cloths, bedding, toys, or personal items such as combs or brushes with anyone else.

What if I think my child has impetigo?

If you think your child has impetigo, take them to see a health care provider.

If your health care provider finds that your child has impetigo, they can prescribe an antibiotic cream to treat the rash. If the rash covers large areas of your child's body, your health care provider might prescribe an oral antibiotic. It is important that your child keeps taking all of the prescribed antibiotics until they are used up, even if the rash has gone away.

With treatment, impetigo should be gone in about 7 days.

How can you help?

Keep your child with impetigo at home

Impetigo is easily spread at daycares, schools and summer camps.

Limit contact with other children with impetigo

If another child has impetigo, you should watch for signs in your own children, and try to limit your child's contact with them.

Wash your hands

If your child gets impetigo, everyone in your home will need to wash their hands carefully and often, especially after any physical contact.

Wash clothes and linens separately

If your child has impetigo, it is important to wash their clothes and bed linens separately

from other's. Use hot water to wash, and dry items in a hot dryer.

Tell your child not to touch or scratch sores

Keep their fingernails short and clean. Help them to wash their hands often.

As the disease develops, loose crusts on the skin can be soaked for 15 to 20 minutes with a warm wet facecloth, then gently washed off with soap and water and patted dry.

When can my child return to school or daycare?

Your child can usually return to school or daycare after 24 hours of antibiotic treatment. This will reduce the chance of spreading impetigo to other children.



BC Centre for Disease Control
Provincial Health Services Authority

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