



Impetigo

What is Impetigo?

Impetigo is a skin infection caused by one or both of the following bacteria: *Staphylococcus aureus* (the most common cause) and group A *Streptococcus*.

- Primary impetigo is when the infection affects healthy skin.
- Secondary impetigo is when the infection affects skin that is already 'broken' by another skin condition. For example, skin with eczema, psoriasis or a cut sometimes develops a secondary impetigo.

Who gets impetigo?

Impetigo commonly occurs in children 2 through 5 years old, but it can affect anyone at any age. It occurs more commonly in hot humid weather. It is contagious and sometimes outbreaks occur in families, in people who live in close communities, such as army barracks and in large group settings such as in schools and daycare centers.

How is it spread?

Impetigo is spread from person to person through direct contact with discharge from blisters or through contact with items that an infected person has touched.

What is the incubation period?

A rash or sores typically appears 4-10 days after the skin becomes infected with the bacteria.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Symptoms of Impetigo include the following:

- Red itchy and occasionally painful sores.
- Blisters that break open and leak a clear fluid or pus for a few days followed by,

- A crusty yellow or 'honey colored' scab that forms over the sore, which heal without leaving a scar.

Around the nose and mouth and on the arms or legs are the most commonly affected areas but impetigo can occur on any part of the skin. Patches of impetigo can vary in size.

Should a person with impetigo be isolated?

As impetigo is contagious (which means it can be passed on to others):

- Try not to touch patches of impetigo and do not allow other children to touch them.
- Wash your hands after touching a patch of impetigo and after applying antibiotic cream.
- Wash hands often with soap and water.
- Wash clothes, linen and towels daily.
- Don't share towels, flannels, bathwater, etc until the infection has gone.
- Children should be kept out of school or nursery until all sores are crusted and healed or 48 hours after starting antibiotic treatment.

What type of treatment and care should be given?

Impetigo may clear without treatment after 2-3 weeks. However, treatment is usually advised as it is contagious and severe infection sometimes develops. An antibiotic cream used for 7-10 days is the usual treatment if there are only a few small patches of impetigo on the skin. The crusts should be cleaned off with warm soapy water before applying the cream. This allows the antibiotic to penetrate into the skin. Antibiotic liquid medicine or tablets may be prescribed in some situation.

Adapted from:

'Impetigo: All you need to know' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022
<https://www.cdc.gov/groupastrep/diseases-public/impetigo.html>
(Assessed by 18 April 2023).