

MANAGING YOUR IMPETIGO

What is Impetigo?

Impetigo is a very common, mild skin infection. It occurs most often in babies and children. It spreads easily from one person to another, especially when they're crowded together. Siblings and people who play contact sports are more prone to it.

What Causes Impetigo?

Two kinds of bacteria called *Staphylococcus* (staph) and *Streptococcus* (strep) cause impetigo, separately or together. These bacteria normally live on the skin surface, but they can get into top layers of the skin and cause infection. Impetigo is more likely when skin is injured, such as with scratches, scrapes, or insect bites.

Young children can spread it because hands carry bacteria and the children often touch each other without washing their hands.

What Are the Symptoms of Impetigo?

Impetigo starts with painless blisters, usually on the face, especially around the nose and mouth. Blisters fill with clear or yellow fluid, eventually burst open, and leave a gold crust. Blisters may itch or burn. They don't usually leave scars.

Rarely, impetigo can lead to kidney inflammation, with blood or protein in the urine.

How is Impetigo Diagnosed?

The health care provider will make a diagnosis from the look of the skin blisters and sores. Tests may be done to find out which bacteria are causing the infection. A swab may be used to take a

sample of fluid inside a blister. Blood or urine tests may also be done to be sure that bacteria haven't caused a complication.

How is Impetigo Treated?

Impetigo should be treated quickly to keep it from spreading under the skin and preventing additional damage. If left untreated, impetigo can continue for weeks, and the bacteria may, in rare cases, damage the kidneys.

Impetigo responds rapidly to medicine plus soaking and washing. Most cases go away within 7 to 10 days. Antibiotics, given as skin creams or pills, will kill the bacteria. Crusts that remain after blisters burst should eventually be removed. Blisters are first soaked with a wet cloth. Then the area is washed with antibacterial soap.

DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Impetigo

- ✓ **DO** keep your skin clean by hand washing. Maintain good hygiene. Bathe or shower at least once daily. Wash your whole body with an antibacterial soap.
- ✓ **DO** thoroughly wash skin scrapes and cuts and insect bites.
- ✓ **DO** keep toys and other objects that children play with clean.
- ✓ **DO** tell your health care provider if you don't feel well while taking medicine.
- ✓ **DO** trim children's nails if scratching is a problem.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you're not better in 7 to 10 days, you have persistent fever even with treatment, family members become infected, or your urine has blood in it.

- ⊗ **DON'T** scrape or scratch blisters.
- ⊗ **DON'T** have close contact with other people while you still have blisters.
- ⊗ **DON'T** shave infected areas or anywhere that is red and inflamed.
- ⊗ **DON'T** share washcloths, towels, or beds while you have impetigo.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following source:

- American Academy of Dermatology: Tel: (866) 503-SKIN (503-7546); Website:
<http://www.aad.org>

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