



IMPETIGO (Non-invasive Streptococcus A)

What is impetigo?

Impetigo (pronounced: *im pe TIE go*) is a skin infection that is common in children, and most often occurs in the summertime. It is found in all parts of the world and is usually caused by bacteria that get into scrapes, cold sores, insect bites, or patches of eczema.

What does it look like?

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 then 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 it is not treated.

This rash usually appears around the nose, the 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 nodes in the face or neck. This swelling will be accompanied by a fever.

Is it serious?

Ordinarily, impetigo is a mild infection. Children with impetigo will have little discomfort other than occasional itching. However, impetigo is very infectious, and infants and the elderly are most at risk of catching the infection after contact with an infected person. In rare cases, impetigo can infect the bloodstream, which can cause kidney disease in children.

How is it spread?

Impetigo is easily passed from one person to another. The infection is spread by skin-to-skin contact - for example, when someone touches the rash with their hand and then touches another person. It can take from one day up to ten 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 the infection. It is very important to wash your hands after touching the rash, as impetigo is easily passed on by hand-to-hand contact. As well, an infected child should not be sharing towels, clothes, face cloths or toilet articles such as combs or brushes with anyone else.

See your doctor

If you think your child has impetigo, take her or him to see a doctor. Be careful to protect yourself and other children from contact with the infected child. If your doctor finds that your child does have the disease, it can be easily treated with antibiotic cream or antibiotic medicine. The treatment will clear up the impetigo in about five days.

How can parents help?

This infection is easily spread at daycares, schools and summer camps. An infected child should stay at home. If you know of another child who has impetigo you should watch for signs in your own children, and try to limit your child's contact with the infected child. If your child gets impetigo, then everyone in your home will need to wash their hands carefully and often, especially after any physical contact. It is important to wash your child's clothes and bed linens separately. To be extremely careful it is best to boil them. Children with impetigo should be encouraged not to touch their sores. Keep their fingernails short and clean. They should also be helped 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 then patted dry.

NOTE: After your child begins taking any medicine, they should wait at least 24 hours before going back to school or daycare. This will reduce the chance of spreading the infection to other children. It is important that your child keeps taking all of the prescribed medicine until it is used up - even after the rash has gone away.

For additional information, contact your local Public Health office or your family doctor.

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