

Fact Sheet

Impetigo



What is impetigo?

Impetigo, sometimes called "school sores" is a bacterial infection of the skin.. The principal cause are strains of staphylococcus aureus (golden staph). The usual golden staph strains which cause impetigo are not dangerous.

What does it look like?

Impetigo occurs in two forms, blistering and crusted.

In blistering impetigo the blisters arise on previously normal skin and grow quickly in size and number. The blisters quickly rupture and leave slightly moist or glazed areas with a brown crust at the edge. The spots expand quickly even after they break open and can be many centimetres wide. They are sometimes clear in the centre to produce ring shaped patterns. The condition is not usually painful but can be itchy.

Crusted impetigo has a thick soft yellow crust. Beneath this crust is a moist red area. Crusted impetigo spots grow slowly and are always smaller than the fully developed spots of blistering impetigo. The condition is not usually painful but can be itchy.

Impetigo can occur on top of other skin conditions, particularly itchy ones. When the other skin condition is 'scratched' the infection can enter through the broken skin. Some of these conditions are atopic dermatitis (eczema), scabies, insect bites and head lice.

How is it treated?

Impetigo is very easy to catch from other people. If possible the child should be isolated until the blisters have dried out. Bathing the blisters with salty water will help to dry them out. Your doctor should take a swab from the spots to check which antibiotic to use.

The result of this takes several days. The doctor will probably start an antibiotic which is likely to be the correct one while he/she is waiting for the pathology results. For just a few small spots, an antibiotic cream may be enough, but more often a medicine needs to be taken by mouth. It is important to finish the whole course of treatment (usually 5 days) and not stop when the condition starts to clear. If there are any other underlying skin diseases these should be treated properly as well. They can be treated at the same time as the impetigo. If other family members have skin lesions they should also be treated. Check with your doctor for a treatment plan.

Remember

- Impetigo is very easy to catch from other people.
- If prescribed antibiotics it is important to finish the whole course to make sure the impetigo will not recur.

This fact sheet is for education purposes only.
Please consult with your doctor or other health professional
to make sure this information is right for your child.

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the
children's
hospital at Westmead

www.chw.edu.au

 **SYDNEY
CHILDREN'S
HOSPITAL
RANDWICK**

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