

Impetigo/School Sores

Impetigo is an infection of the skin and is often called 'school sores'. Impetigo is very easily spread, but with care spread can be reduced.

What is impetigo?

Impetigo is an infection of the skin caused by bacteria (usually by one of two bacteria called either staphylococcus aureus or group A, b haemolytic streptococcus). These bacteria can live on the skin, in the throat or nose, or on other parts of the body without causing a problem but sometimes they start to cause an infection such as impetigo.

- Impetigo can occur on healthy skin but it often happens when a scratch, bite or a disease affecting the skin such as eczema or chicken pox has already damaged the skin.
- Impetigo is very easily spread.
- It is more common in the hotter months.



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Signs and symptoms

- The sores can be anywhere on the body, but are often on the face near the mouth and nose, or on the arms and legs.
- Impetigo may start with a blister or a group of blisters.
- The blister bursts leaving a patch of red, wet skin, which weeps.
- The spot usually becomes coated with a tan or yellowish crusts, making it look like it has been covered with honey.
- There can be small spots around the first spots, spreading outwards.
- Impetigo is usually itchy.
- The sore takes about one to three days to develop after contact with fluid or crusts from a sore.
- There is often superficial peeling on the edge.

How is it spread?

- The sore is itchy and children can scratch it, often spreading the infection to nearby skin or to other parts of their own body.
- The fluid and crusts of the sore contain the bacteria. Contact with the sore or with things that have been on the sore (e.g. clothing, dressings, towels etc) can spread the infection to other people.
- A sore can be infectious for as long as it is weeping. Usually it has stopped being infectious about 24 hours after treatment with an antibiotic has been started, and healing has begun.
- The germs can also be spread from other parts of the body that do not appear to be affected, e.g. from a runny nose.

Treatment

- A child with impetigo needs to be checked by a doctor to be sure that it is impetigo; and because sometimes an antibiotic medicine is prescribed.
- Remove the crusts from the sores. The best way to do this is to bathe the child for 20-30 minutes, while wiping the crust away with a wet towel.
- Try to prevent your child scratching the sores as much as possible. Cover the sores with a watertight dressing and cut your child's fingernails.
- Continue medical treatment until all sores are healed.
- Your child can go back to school, kindergarten or day care after 24 hours of treatment and when the sores are completely covered with dressings.
- Sores should clear in a few days with treatment but may need to be treated again.

Reducing the spread of impetigo

Impetigo is not usually a serious infection, but it is easily spread. People tend to worry about it because it is on the skin and easy to see. Impetigo can occur even when the skin is kept clean - it is not a sign of poor hygiene or bad parenting. If your child has impetigo, the following may help reduce spread:

- A daily bath or shower with soap and water may reduce the risk of impetigo. Antiseptic soaps can be used, but these can irritate the skin of some people.
- Good hygiene including regular hand washing and throwing away used tissues is advised. Cut your child's fingernails short and keep them clean.
- Make sure that grazes or cuts are thoroughly washed. If your child is scratching a sore it may be wise to cover it with a dressing.
- People coming in contact with someone with impetigo need to wash their hands regularly. Put all dressings in a bin with a lid as soon as they are taken off.
- Wash your child's clothes, towels and bed linen separately from the rest of the family. Wash them in hot water and dry in the sunshine or a hot tumble dryer. Toys can be washed using a mild disinfectant.

Follow up..... See the doctor again if:

- The sores are spreading or getting worse, even after treatment.
- Your child has become unwell, e.g. with a fever.
- You are worried for any other reason.

Key points to remember

- Impetigo is very contagious (infectious) and can be easily spread to other children.
- Try to prevent your child scratching the sores as much as possible. Cover the sores with a watertight dressing and cut your child's fingernails.
- Your child can go back to school, kindergarten or day care after 24 hours of treatment and when the sores are completely covered with dressings.
- Continue medical treatment until all sores are healed.
- It is extremely important to remove the crusts, even if the child is taking antibiotics.

More information

- South Australian Department of Health ['You've got what?'](#)

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