



Impetigo

What is impetigo?

- Impetigo is a bacterial skin infection caused by either the *Staphylococcus* or *Streptococcus* organism, or both. *Staphylococcus* or *Streptococcus* bacteria can live harmlessly on the skin surface and also in the nose of people.
- Impetigo is also known as school sores because it commonly affects school-aged children. It is most common in children between the age of 2 and 6 years.

Incubation period?

Lesions will appear 1-3 days after the person is infected and will be infectious as long as there is fluid weeping from the sores.

What are the symptoms?

Common symptoms of impetigo include:

- The skin itches and reddens
- A collection of blisters forms, commonly around the nose and mouth
- The blisters pop and weep a yellow, sticky fluid
- The area develops a raised and wet-looking crust
- The scab dries and falls off
- The skin completely heals after a few days.

Symptoms of severe impetigo infection

If large areas of the skin are affected, symptoms may also include:

- Fever
- Swollen lymph glands
- General feeling of unwellness (malaise).

How do you get Impetigo?

- Impetigo is spread by direct contact with sores or mucus from the nose or throat of an infected person. The sores have large numbers of bacteria present, so impetigo is very contagious if left untreated. Scratching or touching an infected area of the skin and then touching another part of the body can spread infection to that area. Impetigo can also spread from one person to another in the same manner. Hand-to-skin contact is the most common.

Who is at risk of getting Impetigo?

Persons who have cuts, scratches, insect bites, or other breaks in the skin which come in contact with the bacteria that cause impetigo are at greatest risk. Crowded conditions and participation in skin-to-skin contact activities, such as sports, can increase the risk of infection. Persons who have chronic (long-term) skin conditions, such as eczema, are also more likely to get impetigo.

How do I get treated?

- Impetigo can be treated with prescription antibiotic ointments or creams, which need to be reapplied until the sores have completely healed. Antibiotic syrups or tablets may also be prescribed. It is important to complete any course of antibiotics you are prescribed. If left untreated, impetigo can lead to skin abscesses.
- A child with impetigo should be kept home from school or day care until they have received antibiotic treatment for at least 24 hours (usually then non-infectious).
- The sores on exposed areas are covered with a waterproof occlusive (no holes) dressing. Occasionally a crepe bandage may be needed to hold the dressing in place or help prevent younger children from scratching the sores.

What do I do if I have impetigo?

- You should see your doctor
- Impetigo may be diagnosed by an experienced clinician on the basis of the appearance of the infection. It may also be diagnosed by taking a swab of the blisters or crust and checking for the presence of bacteria.

How do I prevent getting impetigo?

Suggestions to reduce the risk of transmission to other family members include:

- Encourage everyone to wash their hands with soap frequently, and dry completely
- A child with impetigo should be kept home from school or day care until appropriate treatment has begun and the sores on exposed areas are covered with a waterproof occlusive dressing

- Cut your child's fingernails short and encourage them not to scratch scabs or pick their nose
- Avoid scratching or touching the sores to prevent spread to other areas of the body. Use a crepe bandage if necessary
- Keep affected areas of skin clean and covered to minimise the chance of spreading the infection Always wash your hands with soap before and after touching sores or scabs
- Encourage children to use their own towel and face cloth. No sharing
- Wash the child's linen, towels and clothes in hot water. Wash all household linen in hot water while the infection is present
- Dispose of used dressings promptly and thoroughly. Wash and dry hands after the dressings have been disposed of into a plastic bag and dispose into household waste

Care of the impetigo infection at home

- Suggestions for home care include:
- Wash the sores (lesions) with an antibacterial or antiseptic soap every 8 to 12 hours
- After each wash, pat the lesions dry. Use a clean towel each time

- See your doctor if the sores spread and get worse despite treatment, or if the child becomes unwell with fever
- Change the child's linen (towels, sheets, face washer, sleep wear) daily while the infection is present.

Impetigo is dangerous for newborns

Keep the infected person well away from young babies. Impetigo is a serious condition for newborns because the newborn's inexperienced immunity may not keep the infection in check. Without prompt treatment, a severe case of impetigo may threaten a baby's life.

Things to remember

- A child with impetigo should be kept home from school or day care until after an appropriate antibiotic treatment has been used for 24 hours (usually no longer infectious).
- Where possible cover the sores with waterproof dressing and where necessary a crepe bandage
- Practice good personal hygiene.

Where can I get more information about impetigo?

- Health Direct: 1800 022 222
- Your local public health unit:

Public Health Unit	Telephone/Fax No.	Public Health Unit	Telephone/Fax No
North Metropolitan (Perth)	Tel: 9380 7700 Fax: 9380 7719	Midwest (Geraldton)	Tel: 9956 1985 Fax: 9956 1991
South Metropolitan (Perth)	Tel: 9431 0200 Fax: 9431 0223	Kimberley (Broome)	Tel: 9194 1630 Fax: 9194 1631
Great Southern (Albany)	Tel: 9842 7500 Fax: 9842 2643	Goldfields (Kalgoorlie)	Tel: 9080 8200 Fax: 9080 8201
Southwest (Bunbury)	Tel: 9781 2350 Fax: 9781 2382	Wheatbelt (Northam)	Tel: 9622 4320 Fax: 9622 4342
Midwest (Carnarvon)	Tel: 9941 0515 Fax: 9941 0520	Pilbara (Port Hedland) <i>Public Health Unit</i>	Tel: 9158 9222 Fax: 9158 9253
		<i>Hedland Health Campus</i>	Tel: 9174 1000