



Advice to parents about impetigo

Impetigo is a skin infection of skin's surface that primarily affects preschool-aged children. The most common form of impetigo, which produces reddening of the skin and a yellow crust, is caused by *Staphylococcus aureus* or *Streptococcus pyogenes* bacteria.

While often appearing on the face, impetigo can develop on almost any part of the body. Children with eczema are more likely to develop impetigo because the bacteria thrive on moist, irritated skin. It is important for such children to use lotion to soften the affected area, and possibly also a cortisone cream.

Small skin changes often go away on their own, if the affected area is washed with soap and water. If large areas of skin are affected, an antibiotic ointment or sometimes an oral antibiotic may be needed.

Treatment

If the skin changes are small, moisten and wash the affected area carefully with liquid soap and water both morning and night until the crust goes away. Additional treatment of any open or weeping sores with an antibacterial chlorhexidine solution may be effective. The solution is sold over the counter (without a prescription) at pharmacies. Try this treatment for a week.

If the sores have not healed or are continuing to spread, contact your doctor or community health centre. It might be time for an antibiotic ointment, which is usually applied twice a day for five days.

If your child has extensive skin changes or impetigo that gets significantly worse, the best solution might be an oral antibiotic.

Taking antibiotics when they aren't needed is a bad idea since they also affect the "good" bacteria in your body. Antibiotics can also have side effects, such as diarrhoea and skin rash. The use of antibiotics can also lead to bacterial resistance, which means that antibiotics won't have any effect when needed to fight serious infections.

Preventing contagion

Both parents and children should wash their hands often. Use of an alcohol-based hand sanitizer is also recommended. Avoid direct contact with the affected area. Single-use paper towels are a good idea. Cut your child's fingernails and try to keep him or her from scratching the sores. Change the child's clothes and pillow case often. Changing the child's toothbrush and pacifier is also recommended. Wash toys, door handles and other objects that the child touches.

Preschool children should stay at home until the sores look completely dry. Older children who understand the importance of thoroughly washing their hands can go to school.