

Impetigo

Impetigo is a very common skin infection in children. Caused by bacteria, the infection usually causes a crusty rash. Less commonly, it causes a blistering rash. Both types of impetigo are usually not serious and clear up within a week or two.

What is impetigo?

Impetigo is a common skin rash in children. It is usually caused by infection of the very top layer of the skin with *Staphylococcus* or less often with *Streptococcus* bacteria. The rash rarely causes serious problems and usually clears up with or without antibiotic treatment. However, the infection is contagious and may spread to other people your child comes into contact with.

What does it look like?

The most common type is *nonbullous* (nonblistering) impetigo:

- Your child develops a rash, usually beginning on the face or limbs. The rash often starts in areas where a minor injury has occurred, such as a scrape, burn, or insect bite.
- Small pimples form, soon changing into a crusty, orange-yellow rash. The rash spreads easily to other areas of the skin.
- The rash is usually not painful but is sometimes itchy.

Bullous (blistering) impetigo usually occurs in infants and young children:

- Small blisters develop on your child's body, most commonly on the face, buttocks, and trunk. In babies, the blisters may first appear in the diaper area.
- The blisters pop easily.
- The blisters may or may not be itchy.

Your child may have a mix of the two types of impetigo. Both types usually clear up in a week or two.

- Antibiotic treatment may help your child's impetigo heal faster. Unless there are complications, healing usually occurs without scarring.

What are some possible complications of impetigo?

- If impetigo is caused by *Streptococcus* bacteria, there is a small risk of a kidney problem called glomerulonephritis, which causes blood in the urine.
- Very rarely, the infection can spread to the deeper skin layers (cellulitis).

What puts your child at risk of impetigo?

- The bacteria that cause impetigo spread on close contact with another person. If your child has impetigo, there is a chance the infection will spread to others in your family.
- Impetigo can follow minor scrapes.

Can impetigo be prevented?

- Washing your hands frequently is probably the best way to prevent the infection.
- Do not share towels or similar items.

How is impetigo treated?

- Your child may receive antibiotics to fight the infection causing impetigo, which may help it to clear up more quickly. A common medication is an antibiotic ointment called Bactroban (generic name: mupirocin). Apply the ointment frequently as instructed by your doctor, usually three times daily for 7 to 10 days.
- Oral antibiotics may be prescribed if your child has widespread impetigo or in other situations.
- Keep the area of the rash clean.

When should I call your office?

Call our office if:

- Your child's impetigo doesn't start to get better within 3 days after treatment.
- Your child develops new impetigo lesions, or the rash seems to be spreading.
- The skin surrounding the rash is becoming red, swollen, or painful.
- Your child's urine becomes red colored.