



CINCINNATI HEALTH DEPARTMENT
SCHOOL HEALTH PROGRAM

IMPETIGO INSTRUCTION SHEET

Can my child go to school?

Children who may have impetigo are excluded from school until treatment is started. Sores should be covered by clothing or a band-aid when the child returns to school.

What Is Impetigo?

Impetigo is a skin infection causing one or more "sores" on the skin that are often covered by a honey-colored crust. The sores don't hurt, but may be tender if touched. Any skin area can be affected, but sores are usually found on arms or legs, or the face (mainly around the mouth, nose, or ears). Anyone can get impetigo, but it most often occurs in children and is spread easily.

What causes Impetigo?

Impetigo is usually caused by bacteria found on skin and in the nose. The bacteria do not always cause problems. But, when small cuts, scratches, severe chapped lips, or insect bites occur, these bacteria can get under the skin surface and cause infection. Infected areas are often pinkish and puffy with tiny blisters. When the blisters break, the fluid dries to form the honey-colored crusts. As the bacteria multiply, the sores can increase in number and size. (Do not confuse impetigo crusts with normal "scabs," which are dark/reddish brown and "shrink" as the wound heals).

How is Impetigo treated?

- **Impetigo must be treated with antibiotics**
- Remove the crusts before putting the antibiotic cream on by soaking the area in warm, soapy water until the crusts soften and can be wiped away.
- Gently scrub the sore to wash away more bacteria.
- Pat the area dry and apply a thin layer of antibiotic ointment with a clean Q-tip.
- Continue to do this three or four times a day until new crusts have stopped forming.
- For larger or deeper sores, or sores on the face, oral antibiotics (pills or liquid taken by mouth) are needed.

How is Impetigo spread?

The bacteria are easily passed to other people or to other areas of the skin by dirty hands or fingernails, or by clothing or other objects that have touched the sores. Germs can also be passed by nasal or respiratory secretions (coughing and sneezing).

Children with impetigo should not sleep, play, or have close contact, with other children until after they have been seen and treated by a doctor.

What happens if Impetigo is not treated?

If impetigo is not treated promptly, it can spread to other areas of the body or to other people. Untreated impetigo can also, in some cases, lead to severe illness like kidney disease.

How can Impetigo be prevented?

- Wash hands frequently. If you are caring for someone with impetigo, be sure to wash your hands often; do not touch the sores.
- Bathe daily with soap and water.
- Keep face, hands, and hair clean.
- Keep fingernails clean and short so that scratching will not spread bacteria.
- Change and wash clothing, sheets, towels, and other items that come in contact with impetigo sores or crusts with hot water and soap.
- Do not let your children play, or have other close contact, with a child who may have impetigo until the impetigo is treated.
- If you or your child gets a cut, scratch, or insect bite, wash the wound with soap and water. Ask your physician or pharmacist about using antibiotic ointment (first-aid ointment).

See a doctor if a cut or insect bite does not heal properly or it if gets larger or has a honey-colored crust. It may be impetigo.