



Central Michigan District Health Department
“Promoting Healthy Families, Healthy Communities”

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www.cmdhd.org

Impetigo

What is Impetigo?

Impetigo is a skin infection caused by Streptococcus group A and staphylococcus (staph) bacteria. The infection is common in children and occurs when the bacteria gets into scrapes and insect bites. The infection is most common in the summer. Some people think that children get impetigo because they have not been washed properly. However, impetigo does not result from a lack of cleanliness.

What are the symptoms?

Impetigo is a skin rash that is characterized by a cluster of blisters or red bumps. The blisters may ooze or be covered with a honey-colored crust. The rash usually appears around the nose, mouth and parts of the skin not covered by clothes. It is often itchy.

How is it spread?

Impetigo is spread from person to person through direct contact with the discharge from the sores; for example when someone touches an impetigo rash and then touches another person. Less commonly, it can be spread through touching articles (such as clothing, bedding, towels, etc.) contaminated with the drainage. This infection can rapidly spread among persons in close contact, such as infants and children in a childcare facility or school or skin to skin contact through playing sports like wrestling or football. The incubation period for impetigo is a 7-10 day period between contact of the germ on the skin to development of the lesions.

What is the treatment?

A physician can diagnose impetigo by examining the child. The specific germ causing the infection can be found when a culture (or swab) is taken by a physician. The infection is treated with antibiotics, which may be given by mouth or applied on the skin in the form of an ointment.

A person with impetigo should:

- Wash the rash with soap and water and cover it loosely with gauze, a bandage, or clothing – wear gloves.
- Wash hands thoroughly, especially after touching an infected area of the body.
- Use separate towels and washcloths.
- Wash an infected person’s clothes, linens and towels everyday and don’t share them with anyone else in the family.
- Avoid contact with newborn babies.
- Be excluded from school or daycare until 24 hours after the start of treatment.
- Be excluded from food handling until 24 hours after the start of treatment.