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nationwidechildrens.org

IMPETIGO

Impetigo (im-pe-TIE-go) is a skin infection caused by bacteria (germs). It can be spread to other parts of the body and to other people. It is more common in the summer when the skin is often broken by cuts, scrapes, and insect bites.

Impetigo starts as a discolored pimple. Then small honey-colored blisters or scabs form and quickly break. The "weeping" sores form yellow crusts and the skin around the sore is red.

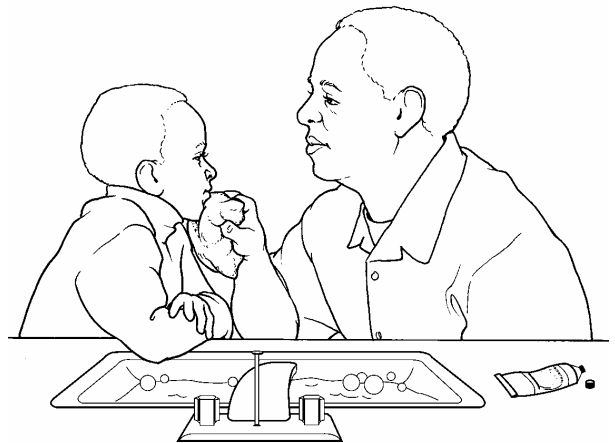
Bacteria live beneath the scabs. When the scabs break, germs are spread to the skin. If there are only a few sores, impetigo can often be treated by keeping the sores clean with soap and water and applying an antibiotic ointment. If a large number of sores have spread over the body, your child may also be given a prescription for an antibiotic to take by mouth.

To treat impetigo and keep it from spreading, follow these instructions 3 to 4 times a day. You will need:

- Water
- Germ-fighting anti-bacterial soap, such as Dial
- Antibiotic ointment (as ordered by your doctor)
- Clean washcloth and towel

WHAT TO DO

1. Wash your hands.
2. Read the label on the antibiotic ointment.
3. If necessary, have someone help hold your child.
4. Using a washcloth soaked in warm, soapy water, soak the crusty areas on the skin to loosen the crusts or scabs (Picture 1). It is **very important** to remove **all** the crusts so the antibiotic ointment can get through to kill the germs.
5. You may have to rub the area **gently**, but don't scrub it because this can push the germs into normal skin and lead to more impetigo. A little bleeding is common when you remove all the crusts.
6. After the crusts have been removed on all the sores, apply the antibiotic ointment to each sore and the area of skin around the sore. Rub the ointment in well. Start from the outside area around the sore and work to the center of the sore.
7. Any new crust that has formed should also be completely removed.
8. Wash your hands well when you are finished.
9. Continue to apply the antibiotic ointment for 3 days after the sores have healed.



Picture 1 Wash sores with soap 3 to 4 times a day, before you put on the antibiotic ointment.

OTHER ADVICE

- Wash the bathtub and the sink well after each use. **Do not use the kitchen sink for washing.**
- Wash the towel, washcloth, and bed linens after each use.
- Any clothes, towels, or bed linens that have drainage from the impetigo on them should be washed with a disinfectant such as Lysol.
- Explain to your child that **he should use only his own washcloth, towel, or bed linens.** He should **not** use anyone else's, and no one else should use his linens.
- If your child seems to be itching at night, have him wear cotton mittens or socks on his hands at night to prevent scratching.

TO KEEP FROM SPREADING IMPETIGO

- Every time your child touches the impetigo and then scratches another part of the skin or touches another person, a new area of impetigo can get started.
- To stop the spread of impetigo, tell your child not to touch or pick at the sores. Keep his fingernails cut short, and have your child wash his hands often with soap such as Dial, Lifebuoy, or Safeguard.
- Impetigo heals faster if left uncovered. But, if your child picks at the sores, keep the sores covered with a loose fitting Band-Aid.
- Keep your child out of school until he has been using the antibiotic ointment or taking the antibiotic by mouth for 24 hours.

WHEN TO CALL THE DOCTOR

Call your doctor if the sores have not improved in 2 or 3 days, or if the sores spread rapidly. Your doctor may need to prescribe an antibiotic to take by mouth for 10 days to make the impetigo go away completely.

If you need a doctor for your child, call the Nationwide Children's Hospital Referral and Information Line at (614) 722-KIDS.