

# Impetigo

## What is impetigo?

Impetigo (im-puh-TIE-go) is a bacterial infection of the top layer of skin. It often is around the nose or mouth, or somewhere else on the face. It may also be on the legs, arms, or diaper area. Signs include:

- Red sores that quickly burst, ooze, and then form a yellowish-brown crust
- Painless, fluid-filled blisters
- Itching
- Rarely fever with enlarged lymph nodes

## Who gets it and why?

Impetigo is most common in children, but adults can also get it. It is more common in hot and humid weather. Crowded living conditions and poor hygiene may contribute to getting impetigo. It often starts when bacteria enter the skin through scratches, cuts, or insect bites. It can later spread to healthy skin.

## How do I know if I have it?

The rash of impetigo can look like blisters, a sore, or a burn. You should have your doctor look at the rash and choose how to best treat it.

## How is it treated?

It can be treated with an antibiotic ointment or cream such as mupirocin (one brand: Bactroban) or retapamulin (one brand: Altabax). If the rash is on a large portion of your body, you may need to take antibiotics by mouth.

To help control the infection, you should remove any yellow crusts by softening them with soapy water. An antibiotic ointment can work deeper in the sore after the crust is removed.

## What can I expect?

Impetigo usually heals without scarring. Although it normally goes away on its own in a few weeks, treatment is still recommended because it often gets worse before it gets better. Sometimes it can turn into a much more serious skin condition. Call your doctor if the rash changes the look of the skin around it.

## How can I prevent it?

Be sure to completely clean minor cuts and scrapes with soap and clean water. You can also use a mild antibacterial soap.

## How can I keep from spreading it?

Because your child can get it by touching others who have it and can spread it by scratching, you should wash your child's hands often. Be sure to keep your hands away from the rash and apply the antibiotic ointment with a cotton swab. Wash your hands after treating the rash. Do not share towels. If you are treating an area that is usually shaved, do not shave that area. You should also throw away razors you recently used. Quickly diagnosing and treating impetigo can reduce the chances of spreading it.



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## Impetigo *(continued)*

### Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

eMedicineHealth

[http://www.emedicinehealth.com/impetigo/article\\_em.htm](http://www.emedicinehealth.com/impetigo/article_em.htm)

Mayo Clinic

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/impetigo/basics/definition/con-20024185>

MedlinePlus

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000860.htm>

U.S. National Library of Medicine

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0001863/>

WebMD

<http://www.webmd.com/skin-problems-and-treatments/tc/impetigo-overview>

### Notes:

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This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.

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