



Hawaii State Department of Health

Disease Investigation Branch

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Impetigo

What is impetigo?

Impetigo is a common bacterial infection of the skin caused by streptococcal and staphylococcal bacteria. Most cases of impetigo occur in young children. It usually appears on the face, especially around the nose and mouth.

How do you get it?

Impetigo frequently begins with a small scratch, scrape, or insect bite that becomes infected with bacteria. Sometimes it may start on intact skin. Impetigo can spread from person-to-person by direct contact, or can spread from one part of the body to another. It also can be spread through sharing towels, clothing, or bed linens.

What are the symptoms of impetigo?

Impetigo usually begins as a reddish spot or bump on the skin. Fluid or pus accumulates, erupts, and dries, leaving a honey-colored scab. The sore may be itchy, but not painful. Healing generally occurs without scarring. However, scratching the sore can cause the spread of infection to other sites.

When infection gets into second layer of the skin (dermis), it will cause painful sores with fluid or pus inside, ulcers, then a hard, thick, gray-yellow crust covering the sore. It may also cause swollen lymph glands near the affected area, and scars that remain after the ulcers heal.

When do symptoms start?

The symptoms usually start 1 to 3 days after bacteria are introduced into the skin.

What is the treatment for impetigo?

Impetigo is treated by keeping the infected skin clean with soap and water and/or antibiotic medications. Topical antibiotics can be used to treat localized infections. For more extensive infections or if topical antibiotic does not work, oral antibiotics may be prescribed.

Should an infected person stay away from work or school?

Yes. A student should be excluded from school until cleared to return by a doctor.

How can you keep from getting it?

- Practice good personal hygiene at all times.
- Promptly clean and treat any small cuts or abrasions of the skin.
- Keep the area clean and avoid touching or scratching the sores.
- When caring for infected persons, wash your hands often with soap and water to avoid transmitting the disease to others.
- Do not share towels, wash cloths or clothing with someone with impetigo without first washing the items in hot soapy water.

For more information, see the CDC's website at:
http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/groupstreptococcal_g.htm