

This leaflet has been produced for your information.  
For further advice please contact the school office or  
your doctor's surgery.

## **IMPETIGO**

### **What is impetigo?**

Impetigo is a bacterial infection of the surface of the skin. In the UK it is the most common skin infection seen in young children.

### **What are the symptoms?**

Impetigo can make the skin sore and itchy, but the infection does not usually make you feel ill.

### **What does impetigo look like?**

Impetigo can crop up anywhere, but is most common on exposed areas of skin such as the face (around the nose and mouth) and on the hands. It starts as a rash of thin-roofed pus-filled blisters, which tend to break easily to leave round oozing patches covered with yellow or brownish crusts. The patches are small at first (e.g. half a centimetre or so across), but slowly get bigger. Smaller patches can arise nearby, and may enlarge too. Impetigo can also present with blisters that appear in normal looking skin; it is called bullous impetigo and is caused exclusively by *S. aureus*. As the patches clear up, their crusts fall off and the areas heal without leaving scars, although there may be temporary redness.

**Children with impetigo should be kept off school or nursery until it is crusted and healed or 48 hours after starting antibiotic treatment.**

**(Antibiotics help to speed the healing and reduces the infectious period)**

### **How will impetigo be diagnosed?**

Your doctor will base the diagnosis on the way the rash looks, and will check to see if it has come up on top of another skin condition. Your doctor will decide whether you need a course of oral antibiotic tablets as well as antibiotic cream.

### **What can I do?**

Your main aim must be to stop the impetigo spreading to other people, and especially to newborn babies:

- Do not touch patches of impetigo, and stop other people touching them too.
- Hygiene is important - always wash your hands after accidentally touching the area (and ask other people to do the same)
  - Wash your hands after putting the antibiotic cream or ointment on the impetigo.
  - Don't share towels, flannels etc. until the infection has cleared. Always use a clean towel each time the affected area is dried.
- To prevent the spread of germs, the patient's towels, pillowcases, and sheets should be changed and laundered (either at 60°C (140°F), or 40°C (104°F) with the addition of a bleach-based laundry product)

after the first day of treatment; clothing should be changed and laundered daily (see above) for the first few days.

### **What causes impetigo?**

In the UK, impetigo is usually due to a germ known as Staphylococcus aureus. These germs pass from person to person by skin-to-skin contact or less often by bedding, clothing and towels. Impetigo can spread rapidly through families and school classes, however it can spontaneously appear with no link to where it came from. The germs that cause impetigo can invade normal skin, but more often take advantage of skin that is already damaged by cuts or grazes, insect bites, head lice, scabies, cold sores, or eczema.

### **Where can I get more information about impetigo?**

Links to patient support groups:

[www.prodigy.nhs.uk/guidance.asp?gt=impetigo#managementissues](http://www.prodigy.nhs.uk/guidance.asp?gt=impetigo#managementissues)

Web links to detailed leaflets:

[www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/impetigo.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/impetigo.html)

[www.dermnetnz.org/dna.impetigo/impet.html](http://www.dermnetnz.org/dna.impetigo/impet.html)

For details of source materials used please contact the Clinical Standards Unit ([clinicalstandards@bad.org.uk](mailto:clinicalstandards@bad.org.uk)).

**This leaflet aims to provide accurate information about the subject and is a consensus of the views held by representatives of the British Association of Dermatologists: its contents, however, may occasionally differ from the advice given to you by your doctor.**

This leaflet has been assessed for readability by the British Association of Dermatologists' Patient Information Lay Review Panel

