

Impetigo Fact Sheet

Impetigo is a contagious skin infection caused by bacteria

Impetigo is a skin infection commonly caused by Group A *Streptococcus* or *Staphylococcus* bacteria. It is usually a mild illness. Complications from impetigo are rare.

Anyone can get impetigo; however, it's more common in children. Other factors that increase your risk of impetigo infection include:

- Injections or injuries that break the skin
- Crowded conditions that bring you in close contact with others
- Lack of proper handwashing or body washing

Impetigo is spread from person to person

The bacteria that cause impetigo are primarily spread from person to person through direct contact with infected skin lesions. Less commonly, impetigo can be spread by touching objects or surfaces (such as clothing, bedding, towels, etc.) that have been contaminated by fluid from the rash sores.

Signs and symptoms of impetigo

Impetigo is characterized by red, itchy sores that break open and leak a clear fluid or pus for a few days. The sores can occur anywhere on the body, but most often appear on exposed skin, such as on:

- Arms
- Legs
- Mouth
- Nose

After a few days, a crusty yellow or "honey-colored" scab forms over the sore, which then heals without leaving a scar.

It usually takes 10 days for sores to appear after someone is exposed.

Talk to your healthcare provider if you think you have impetigo

Healthcare providers often diagnose impetigo based on symptoms; lab tests are typically not needed. Your healthcare provider may prescribe antibiotics to treat impetigo or recommend a topical ointment, depending on how severe the infection is.

Complications from impetigo are rare, but may be more likely in people with infections that go untreated.

Impetigo can be prevented

There is no vaccine for impetigo. You can lower your risk of getting impetigo by:

- Having good personal hygiene.
- Applying first aid to skin injuries.
- Avoiding contact with sick individuals and articles that might have touched their sores or wounds.

If you have impetigo, you can lower the risk to others by:

- Washing the rash with soap and water.
- Covering sores loosely with gauze or bandages and clothing, when possible.
- Washing hands thoroughly, especially after touching an infected area of the body.
- Not sharing towels, washcloths, or other personal items with other people.
- Avoiding contact with newborn babies.
- Staying home from work, school, or other settings that might bring you in close contact with others until 24 hours after the start of treatment or otherwise cleared by a healthcare provider.