



Impetigo

Disease Fact Sheet

What is impetigo?

Impetigo is an infection of the skin caused primarily by the bacterium *Streptococcus pyogenes*, also known as Group A streptococci (GAS).

What are the symptoms of impetigo?

Impetigo begins as a cluster of small blisters that expand and rupture within the first 24 hours. The thin yellow flow that drains from the ruptured blisters quickly dries forming a honey-colored crust. Impetigo develops most frequently around the nose and mouth, but may also be found on the arms, legs or trunk.

How does a person get impetigo?

Impetigo develops after the skin is infected with GAS. The bacterium is usually acquired from skin-to-skin contact with another person with impetigo or contact with items an infected person touched, such as towels, clothes or toys.

Who gets impetigo?

The infection is most common in settings where there is crowding or activities leading to close person-to-person contact such as schools and military installations. Impetigo occurs more commonly in children between the ages of two to six years of age.

How long does it take to develop impetigo following exposure?

Impetigo may develop up to 10 days after the skin becomes infected with the bacteria.

How is impetigo treated?

Impetigo may be treated with an antibiotic taken by mouth or by application of an antibiotic ointment to the affected areas.

How long is a person considered infectious?

A person with impetigo is probably no longer infectious after 24 hours of adequate antibiotic treatment.

What are the complications of impetigo?

Rarely, the bacteria may invade beyond the skin of a person with impetigo and cause illness that is more serious.

What can be done to prevent impetigo?

Simple cleanliness and prompt attention to minor wounds will do much to prevent impetigo. Persons with impetigo or symptoms of GAS infections should seek medical care and if necessary begin antibiotic treatment as soon as possible to prevent spread to others. Individuals with impetigo should be excluded from school, daycare or other situations where close person-to-person contact is likely to occur until at least 24 hours after beginning appropriate antibiotic therapy. Sharing towels, clothing and other personal articles should be discouraged.