Impetigo

Impetigo is an infection of the skin, most common in babies and children.

CAUSES

It is caused by staphylococcal or streptococcal germs (*bacteria*). Impetigo can start after any damage to the skin. The damage to the skin may be from things like:

- Chicken pox.
- Scrapes.
- Scratches.
- Insect bites (common when children scratch the bite).
- Cuts.
- Nail biting or chewing.

Impetigo is contagious. It can be spread from one person to another.
Avoid close skin contact, or sharing towels or clothing.

SYMPTOMS

Impetigo usually starts out as small blisters or pustules. Then they turn into tiny yellow-crusted sores (*lesions*). There may also be:

- Large blisters.
- Itching and/or pain.
- Pus.
- Swollen lymph glands.

With scratching, irritation, or non-treatment, these small areas may get larger. Scratching can cause the germs to get under the fingernails; then scratching another part of the skin can cause the infection to be spread there.

DIAGNOSIS

Diagnosis of impetigo is usually made by a physical exam. A skin *culture* (test to grow bacteria) may be done to prove the diagnosis or to help decide the best treatment.

TREATMENT

Mild impetigo can be treated with prescription antibiotic cream. Oral antibiotic medicine may be used in more severe cases. Medicines for itching may be used.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- To avoid spreading impetigo to other body areas:
  - Keep fingernails short and clean.
  - Avoid scratching.
  - Cover infected areas if necessary to keep from scratching.
- Gently wash the infected areas with antibiotic soap and water.
- Soak crusted areas in warm soapy water using antibiotic soap.
  - Gently rub the areas to remove crusts. Do not scrub.
- Wash hands often to avoid spread this infection.
- Keep children with impetigo home from school or daycare until they have used an antibiotic cream for 48 hours (2 days) or oral antibiotic medicine for 24 hours (1 day), and their skin shows significant improvement.
- Children may attend school or daycare if they only have a few sores and if the sores can be covered by a band-aid or clothing.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- More blisters or sores show up despite treatment.
- Other family members get sores.
- Rash is not improving after 48 hours (2 days) of treatment.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You see spreading redness or swelling of the skin around the sores.
- You see red streaks coming from the sores.
- Your child develops a fever of 100.4° F (37.2° C) or higher.
- Your child develops a sore throat.
- Your child is acting ill (lethargic, sick to their stomach).

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