



# Impetigo

Impetigo is a contagious skin infection often occurring on the nose, arms, legs, or around the mouth. This infection is common in young children ages 2 to 5.

## School health and childcare provider information

### Cause

*Streptococcus* and/or *Staphylococcus* bacteria, including methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA).

### Symptoms

Typically begins at a break in the skin (e.g., insect bite, cut). Sores form on the skin and produce a thick golden-yellow discharge that dries, crusts, and sticks to the skin. Rarely, problems such as kidney disease or cellulitis (skin infection) may develop if children do not receive proper treatment.

### Spread

Spread from person-to-person through touching the fluid from the sores. Rarely, but possible, through touching contaminated objects (e.g., surfaces, clothing, bedding, towels).

### Incubation

It usually takes 1 to 10 days from the time a person is exposed until symptoms begin. Symptoms usually begin 1 to 3 days after exposure to *Streptococcus*; usually 4 to 10 days after exposure to *Staphylococcus*.

### Contagious period

Until sores are dried and healed or the person has been treated with antibiotics for 24 hours.

### Exclusion

*Childcare and school*

If impetigo is confirmed by a health care provider, exclude until 24 hours after treatment has been initiated and sores are healed/drying or exposed sores can be kept covered.

Impetigo

## Diagnosis

Recommend parents/guardians call their health care provider if their child has open sores or an undiagnosed rash. Streptococcal disease cannot be distinguished from staphylococcal infection through physical examination.

## Treatment

Impetigo is treated with topical antibiotics (applied directly to the skin) when only a few sores are present. Oral or injectable antibiotics may be prescribed for more severe cases.

## Prevention

- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water after contact with sores. **Thorough handwashing is the best way to prevent the spread of communicable diseases.**
- Wear disposable medical gloves or use cotton-tipped swabs if applying ointment to sores. Dispose of any soiled tissues, bandages, and gloves carefully.
- Cover sores whenever possible to prevent spread. Discourage children from scratching infected areas. Ask parents to trim child's fingernails.
- Do not share towels, washcloths, or clothing.
- Clean and sanitize mouthed toys, objects, and surfaces at least daily and when soiled (see Section 2).

For more information, call Hennepin County HSPHD-Epidemiology at (612) 543-5230 or call your local health department.

Hennepin County Public Health  
Epidemiology  
612-543-5230  
[epi-envhlth@hennepin.us](mailto:epi-envhlth@hennepin.us)

*Updated March 2024*

