Let's Talk About...

Cellulitis

Cellulitis (sell-you-LITE-us) is an infection of the tissue just under the skin. Signs of cellulitis are swelling, redness, warmth, and tenderness of the skin. Cellulitis can happen anywhere on the body. Children may also have fever and chills. Children with cellulitis on the face or near a joint usually need to go to the hospital for treatment. Cellulitis is a serious infection and should be treated right away. Without treatment, the infection may spread to the blood, bone, or other organs.

Cellulitis is caused by bacteria that may have entered the body through an injury or a surgery site. The bacteria may have traveled through the blood from some other infection such as an ear infection. Children with chickenpox are more likely to get cellulitis.

How do you prevent cellulitis?

Keep cuts and wounds clean and dry and wash your hands well. Children one year or older should receive the chickenpox vaccine (varicella vaccine). This will help keep your child from getting chickenpox.

How do you treat cellulitis?

Your child may receive treatment for cellulitis such as the following:

- Antibiotic medicine by mouth or through a small tube inserted into a vein (IV)
- Acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (Advil®) for fever and discomfort. DO NOT give aspirin to children who have both chickenpox and cellulitis. See the note at the end of this article.
- A surgical opening to drain the infection
- Blood drawn and sent to the laboratory to find the bacteria that caused the infection. This will help the doctor decide the right antibiotics for your child.
- Fluid taken from the infected site with a needle to find the bacteria that caused the infection. This will help the doctor decide the right antibiotics for your child.
- X-rays to find out if the infection has spread to the bone.

Your child's treatment and how long they need to stay in the hospital depends on how serious the infection is. Children with cellulitis may stay in the hospital up to 10 days. Children can usually eat their regular meals and can do their normal activities as long as they are comfortable.

Note:

You can give your child acetaminophen (Tylenol®) if he has a temperature over 101°F (38.3°C).

You can give ibuprofen to children 6 months old and older, but do not give it to children who are dehydrated or vomiting (throwing up) all of the time.

DO NOT give aspirin or any medicine that has aspirin in it to your child if he has chickenpox or other viral infections since it may lead to a very serious brain, liver, and kidney disease called Reye's syndrome. It is important to read the label on all medicines, including brand names like Alka Seltzer®, to make sure the medicine does not have aspirin in it.

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