Let's Talk About...

Impetigo

Impetigo (im-pe-TIE-go) is a skin infection that other people can catch very easily. It is often caused by the bacteria streptococcus (strep-to-KOCK-us), which is often called "strep," or by staphylococcus (STAF-il-low-kock-us) or "staph". Impetigo can appear on any part of the body. Impetigo is more common in the summer, when skin is often broken by cuts, scrapes, and insect bites.

What happens with impetigo?

Impetigo causes sores to appear on the skin. The sores are usually less than 1 inch across. They begin as small, red bumps that quickly change to cloudy blisters, then pimples, and finally sores. The sores are often covered by a soft, golden yellow crust. The fluid released from the sores can spread the bacteria.

The sores are often itchy. Your child can spread the infection to other areas if he scratches a sore and then touches another part of his skin. Be sure to check all over his body for sites of new infection.

What should I do if my child has impetigo?

- Carefully wash the infected areas 3 times a day with an antibacterial soap and water. Allow the crusts to soak off, or gently remove them. Be sure your child washes before each meal.
- Wash your hands completely after caring for your child's skin. Thoroughly wash the tub or sink after your child uses them. Try not to use your kitchen sink to clean your child's infection.
- Thoroughly rinse the washcloth that you use to clean your child's infection. Do not clean any other parts of your child's body with the same washcloth. Explain to your child that he should not use anyone else's washcloth, towel, or bed linens. Make sure that no one shares these items with your child.
- Keep your child's fingernails short and clean. You may want to put gloves or mittens on his hands at night to keep him from spreading the infection by scratching. Encourage your child to keep his hands away from the sores by diverting his attention.
- Your child's doctor may prescribe an antibiotic. Follow the doctor's directions and be sure to finish all the medicine.

If your child has impetigo in small, contained areas, your doctor might prescribe an antibacterial ointment like Bactroban® for him. If you properly treat impetigo, your child's skin can be completely healed in 7 days. Scars are unusual unless your child picks at the sores.

Call the doctor if...

- The sores do not look better in 2 or 3 days.
- The impetigo seems to be spreading.
- Your child has a temperature of 101°F (38.4°C) or more.
- Your child's urine is red or cola-colored.

Intermountain Primary Children's Medical Center
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Pediatric Education Services
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