

Let's Talk About...

Cellulitis

Cellulitis (sell-you-lite-us) is an infection of the tissue just below the skin. Signs of cellulitis are swelling, redness, warmth, and tenderness of the skin. These signs can occur anywhere on the body. Children may also develop a fever and chills. Children with cellulitis on the face or near a joint usually need to go to the hospital for treatment.

The infection is caused by bacteria that may have entered the body through an injury or a surgical opening. The bacteria may also have traveled through the blood from some other site of infection such as an ear infection. There is a higher risk of cellulitis in children with chicken pox.

Cellulitis should be treated immediately. Without treatment, the infection may spread to the blood, bone, or other organs.

How do you prevent cellulitis?

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

How do you treat cellulitis?

- Antibiotics may be given by mouth or directly into a vein (through an IV).
- Acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (Advil®) may be given for fever and discomfort. Aspirin should not be given to children who have both chicken pox

and cellulitis (see the note at the end of this article).

- A surgical opening may be needed to drain the infection.
- Blood may be drawn to find the bacteria causing the infection.
- Sometimes fluid is drawn from the infected site through a needle. This will help find out what antibiotics should be used.
- X-rays may be taken to find out if the infection has spread to the bone.

Your child's treatment and length of stay in the hospital depend on how serious the infection is. Children with cellulitis may stay in the hospital up to 10 days. Children are usually allowed to eat a regular diet and participate in normal activities that are comfortable for them.

Note: acetaminophen (Tylenol®) may be used for temperature over 101°F (38.3°C). Aspirin should NOT be given to children with chicken pox since it may lead to a brain, liver, and kidney disease called Reye's syndrome.

Read the label on all medicines, including brand names like Alka Seltzer®, to make sure they do not contain small amounts of aspirin. Ibuprofen is approved for children 6 months of age and older; but it should never be given to children who are dehydrated or vomiting (throwing up) continuously.



All of the information contained in the *Let's Talk About...series* is for educational purposes only. This educational information is not a substitute for medical advice or for care from a physician or other health care professional. If you have questions about your child's health, contact your health care provider.

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