

What Head Start Parents Should Know About Impetigo

What Is Impetigo?

Impetigo is a common contagious skin infection that may be caused by two germs - *Streptococcus pyogenes* and *Staphylococcus aureus*. Recommended treatment depends on which germs are causing your impetigo, and will usually go away within two to three weeks.

What are the Signs of Impetigo?

The signs of impetigo include red sores that pop easily and leave a yellow crust, fluid-filled blisters, itchy rash, skin lesions, and swollen lymph nodes. The sores can be uncomfortable and painful at times. Impetigo usually shows on the face, neck, and hands of young children and infants. Children who wear diapers tend to get it around the diaper area.

How does Impetigo Spread?

Impetigo is typically spread by skin-to-skin contact with an individual who has impetigo, although it may also be spread by touching things someone with impetigo has touched (for example, towels, bedding, and toys).

Who is at Risk?

Certain individuals and situations make them more likely to develop impetigo. These include:

- Children two to six years of age.
- Crowded environments (for example, child care and Head Start centers).
- Already irritated skin.
- Warm and humid weather.
- Having skin abrasions (such as insect bites) or dermatitis (itchy, inflammation of the skin, sometimes caused by allergic reactions).
- Having a weakened immune system.

How is Impetigo Diagnosed?

If you suspect your child has impetigo, you should have your child see his/her doctor.

Should my Child with Impetigo be Excluded from Head Start?

Children diagnosed with impetigo should remain out of the center until the sores have stopped blistering or crusting, or until 24 hours after starting treatment your doctor recommended. Your child's Head Start center might ask for a note from your doctor to clear your child to return.

How to Stop the Spread of Impetigo?

- Make sure your family uses good hand washing techniques – including scrubbing your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or using alcohol-based gels (hand-sanitizer). Use soap and water if hands are visibly soiled.
- Fingernails should be kept short.
- Cover parts of the skin that are infected, if possible.
- Children with impetigo should be encouraged to not touch the sores.
- Cuts and scratches should be kept clean.
- Use a clean towel or fresh paper towel to dry the body or hands.
- Clothes, linens, towels, and personal items should be washed at least once a day if the child has impetigo and do not share these items with another child in your home.
- Wear gloves when applying antibiotic ointment that a doctor may recommend and wash your hands after removing gloves.
- Clean and disinfect toys.

How to Talk to Children About Impetigo

- Reinforce hand washing. Good hand washing is not only good for children's health in preventing colds and flus; but is also helps children feel like they can make a difference.
- If children have questions, make time to listen and answer their questions.
- Speak in a calm tone of voice. Use reassuring words.
- Keep all explanations easy for your child to understand. Make up a song to make hand washing fun.

Where Can I Learn More?

- [Tips for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers on talking with children about infectious disease outbreaks.](#)