

IMPETIGO

What is it?

Impetigo is a bacterial skin infection.

How do you know someone has it?

Impetigo commonly affects the face (particularly around the nose and mouth), arms and legs. It presents with initial redness which can develop into weeping spots and then golden crusts. Young children are more likely to get impetigo and they may become quite miserable, irritable and feverish. The spots will heal up without scarring.

Is it infectious?

Yes. It is mainly infectious whilst the septic spots are discharging pus. Infection is spread by direct contact, touching is the usual route and this most commonly occurs in crowded situations such as nurseries and schools or by sharing towels with an infected person.

It is more common in the summer when the skin tends to get broken by cuts or insect bites. Good hand washing facilities with soap, warm water, disposable towels and/or hot air hand dryers limit spread.

What is the incubation period?

The time taken from contact with the germ until the illness starts is usually between 4 and 10 days.

Is there any treatment?

Yes. Antibiotic ointment or tablets can be prescribed by the GP. Treatment should be started as soon as possible to prevent spread to others.

What should you do if someone has the infection?

The GP should be visited as soon as possible to obtain treatment. It is important that the golden crusts on the surface of the skin are washed away with soap and water and the skin dried before antibiotic ointment is applied, this is to allow it to get to the site of infection in the skin. Completely separate toilet articles such as soap, face cloths and towels should be kept for the affected individual. Hand washing is probably the most important way of preventing the infection from spreading.

How soon can the person return to work/the care setting?

Impetigo is infectious while the sores are discharging pus.

Children should not attend school until treatment has commenced and all the sores have crusted over/dried. Without treatment a person remains infectious with discharging sores for several weeks, but infectivity stops 2 days after the start of treatment.

