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And
Infection Prevention and Control,
Community and Disability Services HSE
South (Cork and Kerry)*

February 2012



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

IMPETIGO

INFORMATION LEAFLET



What is impetigo?

Impetigo is a skin infection that causes a rash. The rash presents as blisters that ooze and then form a crust that is golden in colour. Impetigo usually affects the face but can occur on any part of the skin.

What causes impetigo?

Impetigo is caused by bacteria. The most common bacteria are *Staphylococcus aureus* (commonly referred to as 'staph'). Another bacteria called *Streptococcus pyogenes* is sometimes the cause. Skin that is not broken is an excellent defense against bacterial infection. Skin that is broken for example by another skin condition such as psoriasis, eczema or by a cut may be more readily infected as the bacteria can get below the skin and cause an infection.

How is impetigo spread?

Impetigo is spread by direct contact i.e. it means it can be passed on by touching. The fluid in the blister is very infectious, and spread occurs by direct contact with this fluid.

How is impetigo diagnosed?

Your doctor can diagnose Impetigo by looking at it. A doctor may take swabs of the skin rash to grow the bacteria if necessary.

How is impetigo treated?

Sometimes your doctor may choose to treat minor cases of impetigo with hygienic measures. Keeping the skin clean can help mild infections heal on their own. Your doctor may prescribe an antibiotic cream for localized sores or oral antibiotics. Before applying the cream, gently wash the affected area with mild soapy water to remove crusts and any fluid. The sores of impetigo heal slowly without leaving scars, although there may be temporary redness.

How may spread be prevented?

Attention to personal hygiene and thorough handwashing is very important to aid healing and stop the infection spreading to other sites on the body and to other people:

- Do not touch patches of impetigo and stop others touching them too.
- Keep fingernails clean and cut short and avoid scratching affected areas.
- Wash your hands before and after applying antibiotic cream.
- Wash your hands after touching a patch of impetigo.
- Do not share towels or face cloths until the infection has gone and wash them in a hot wash.
- Always use a clean face cloth and towel each time the affected area needs to be washed and dried.
- People with impetigo must not handle food as the infective organism may also cause food poisoning.

In a child care setting

If impetigo is suspected it should be brought to the attention of the parents and the child should be seen by their doctor for diagnosis and treatment.

- The child should remain out of a crèche, pre-school or nursery until lesions are crusted and healed, or 24 hours after commencing antibiotics.
- Particular attention should be given to cleaning and disinfecting toys that children place in or near their mouths.
- Children should always have their own towels and face cloths or disposable wipes should be used.
- Try to keep runny noses clean.

These are measures that should be encouraged at all times to prevent this and many other infections from spreading.