

What is it?

Impetigo is a skin infection caused by streptococcal (strep) or staphylococcal (staph) bacteria. It occurs when the bacteria get under the skin through a scrape, cut or insect bite. It is most common in children.

What are the symptoms?

At first, impetigo looks like a cluster of blisters or red bumps. The blisters or lesions may ooze or be covered with a honey coloured crust. The lesions may occur anywhere on the body but are most commonly seen around the mouth and nose. The lesions may be itchy.

How is it spread?

It can spread to other parts of the body and to other people by direct contact with the lesions. It can also spread by touching articles (clothing, towels, bedding, eating utensils, drinking containers, etc.) contaminated with discharges from the lesions. After contact, it may take 4-10 days for the infection to appear on another person. The infection can spread rapidly among persons in close contact with others (e.g. a family, a daycare, or a classroom). It is usually contagious for up to 48 hours after treatment has begun.

When is it contagious?

This disease can be spread as long as the lesions continue to drain or until 24 hours after antibiotic treatment has been started.

How is it controlled?

- See a doctor for diagnosis and follow the prescribed treatment.
- Do not share articles such as washcloths, towels, or clothing.
- If infected, avoid contact with new-born babies.
- Thoroughly wash clothing and items that have been in contact with infected areas.
- Keep infected areas clean by washing with soap and water. If necessary, keep areas covered with a loose gauze or bandage.

How can I protect myself?

Avoid close contact with individuals who have the infection.

Exercise good hand hygiene before eating, after play, after using the bathroom, following diapering, after handling infected areas or articles soiled with discharges from the lesions.

Other Questions?

Talk to your health care provider or call our Communicable Disease Program at 613-966-5500 x349. Toll Free 1-800-267-2803 | TTY Dial 711 (1-800-267-6511) | www.hpepublichealth.ca

References

- Heymann, D.L. (2008). *Control of Communicable Disease Manual* (19th Ed). Washington, DC: American Public Health Association
- Kingston, Frontenac and Lennox & Addington Health Unit, Impetigo, July 2006.

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