

## **Impetigo**

Last Revised: 10/2001

# **Impetigo**

Impetigo is a very common skin infection caused by *streptococcal* or *staphylococcal* bacteria. It may start at an injured spot on the skin, such as an insect bite, cut or burn. The person's hands to other areas of the skin can easily spread it. In children, the face is often involved. The rash appears red, is elevated and may secrete fluid. The rash may have a flat honey-colored crust. The area may be itchy. The staph bacteria can cause blisters, which break easily and leave raw red skin exposed. Impetigo caused by strep bacteria can be associated in very rare circumstances with the development of a kidney disease. Impetigo is most commonly seen in the warm summer months.

### **Who gets this disease?**

Ordinarily the skin protects the body from bacteria. When the skin is broken (i.e., cut, scraped, bitten, scratched), bacteria can get under the surface, multiply and cause an infection. Children - who typically touch everything and wash only under duress - are likely to have multiple cuts and scrapes on their bodies at all times, which make them more vulnerable to impetigo than adults. Most children have impetigo at least a few times during their growing up years; adults can get it as well.

### **How is it spread?**

The bacteria are under, on and in the infected skin, and they are shed into the secretions and crusts. They can be spread to another person who directly touches the infected skin or a surface contaminated by the secretions or crusts. If the bacteria then get under the top protective skin layer of the second person, they multiply and cause infection. The incubation period for this disease is variable: Staph infection 4-10 days strep, 1-3 days.

### **How is it diagnosed and treated?**

Most of the time, impetigo can be diagnosed by the way it looks. Bacterial cultures are not usually needed. Strep and staph impetigo may look the same, although staph tends to cause blisters more often. Treatment usually consists of combination of a special soap, antibiotic ointment and an oral antibiotic.

### **How can the spread of this disease be prevented?**

1. If children hurt themselves and cause breaks in the skin, wash the area thoroughly with soap and water and dry carefully.

**2.** If you think a child may have impetigo:

**a.** Wash the rash with soap and water and cover it loosely with gauze, a bandage, or clothing.

**b.** Be sure anyone who touches the rash wears disposable gloves carefully.

Keep any dirty clothing in a plastic bag and give to the parent for laundering at home.

**c.** Dispose of any soiled tissues, bandages and gloves carefully. Keep any dirty clothing in a plastic bag and give to the parent for laundering at home.

**d.** Ask the parents to have the child seen by his/her healthcare provider.

### **Who should be excluded?**

It is recommended that untreated children and staff be excluded from the child care center until 24-hours after they have begun treatment.

### **Reportable?**

No. Impetigo is not reportable by New Hampshire law. However, Bureau public health nurses are available for consultation.