

Impetigo

Impetigo is a skin infection that's very contagious but not usually serious. Anyone can get it, but it's more common in young children. With treatment, impetigo often gets better in a few days.

Symptoms of impetigo

Impetigo starts with red sores or blisters, but the redness may be harder to see on brown and black skin.

The sores or blisters quickly burst and often leave crusty, golden-brown patches.

The patches can:

- look a bit like cornflakes stuck to your skin
- get bigger and spread to other parts of your body
- be itchy and are sometimes painful



The sores and blisters of impetigo commonly affect the face (around the nose and mouth) and hands.



After the blisters burst, you often have golden-brown crusty patches on your skin.



Sometimes yellow liquid oozes from the blisters and hardens to leave a scaly border around a scab. This is called bullous impetigo.

▼ Other conditions like impetigo

Impetigo can look similar to other skin conditions.

Skin symptoms

Possible cause

Blisters on lips or around the mouth

Cold sores (Link: www.nhs.uk/conditions/cold-sores/)

Itchy, dry, cracked or sore skin

Atopic eczema (Link: www.nhs.uk/conditions/atopic-eczema/)

Itchy blisters

Shingles (Link: www.nhs.uk/conditions/shingles/), chickenpox (Link: www.nhs.uk/conditions/chickenpox/)

See a pharmacist if:

- you have symptoms of impetigo
- your child is aged 12 months or over and has symptoms of impetigo

A pharmacist can give the same medicines as a GP to treat impetigo. They can also give advice or direct you to other medical help if you need it.



Find a pharmacy (Link: <https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/pharmacy/find-a-pharmacy/>)

See a GP if:

You or your child have symptoms of impetigo and:

- your child is aged 11 months or younger
- you're breastfeeding and the impetigo sores are on your breasts
- have a weakened immune system, for example, from chemotherapy
- have had treatment but the symptoms have changed or become worse
- have had impetigo in the past year and it has come back

Impetigo is very infectious. Check with the GP surgery before you go in. They may suggest a phone consultation.

Treatment for impetigo

A pharmacist or GP will check if your symptoms are caused by a more serious skin infection, like cellulitis (Link: www.nhs.uk/conditions/cellulitis/).

If it's impetigo, they may prescribe:

- hydrogen peroxide cream
- antibiotic cream or tablets

Babies and people with a weakened immune system may need antibiotic tablets to stop the infection causing more serious problems.

If your impetigo keeps coming back

A GP may take a swab from your skin to check for the bacteria that causes impetigo. They may also take a swab from inside your nose.

They might prescribe an antiseptic body wash, nasal ointment, or both, to try to clear the bacteria and stop the impetigo coming back.

Make sure you finish treatment

Do not stop using cream or taking antibiotic tablets early, even if the impetigo starts to clear up.

How to stop impetigo spreading or getting worse

Impetigo can be easily spread to other parts of your body or to other people through skin-to-skin contact.

You can also get it by touching things that have been infected, like towels and bedding.

Impetigo stops being contagious:

- 48 hours after you start using hydrogen peroxide cream or antibiotics prescribed by a pharmacist or GP
- when the patches dry out and crust over (if you do not get treatment)

There are some things you can do to help stop impetigo spreading or getting worse while it's still contagious.

Do

- ✓ stay away from work, school or nursery until no longer contagious
- ✓ wash affected areas with soap and water and dry them thoroughly
- ✓ wash your hands frequently, particularly before and after using antibiotic cream
- ✓ wash flannels, towels, sheets and pillowcases at a high temperature
- ✓ wash toys with detergent and warm water if your children have impetigo

Don't

- ✗ do not touch or scratch sores, blisters or crusty patches – this also helps stop scarring
- ✗ do not have close contact with children or people with diabetes or a weakened immune system (if they're having chemotherapy, for example)
- ✗ do not share flannels, towels, sheets or pillowcases
- ✗ do not prepare food for other people if you have impetigo
- ✗ do not go to the gym or play contact sports like football

How to avoid impetigo

Impetigo usually infects skin that's already damaged.

You can get it if you have a minor injury like a cut, scratch or insect bite, or a skin condition.

To avoid getting impetigo:

- keep cuts, scratches and insect bites clean – for example, by washing them with warm water and soap
- get treatment for skin conditions, like eczema (Link: www.nhs.uk/conditions/atopic-eczema/) and scabies (Link: www.nhs.uk/conditions/scabies/)

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