

Impetigo

Fact Sheet

What is Impetigo?

Impetigo is a skin infection caused by the bacteria *Staphylococcus* or *Streptococcus*. It is most common in children and is contagious. Impetigo can form blisters or honey coloured crusted, oozing sores that grow larger day by day. The hands and face are the most common site for Impetigo, but it often appears on other parts of the body.

Treatment for Impetigo

Antibiotics usually clear up impetigo in four or five days. It's important for the antibiotic to be taken until the prescribed supply is completely used up. An antibiotic ointment may be prescribed also. Crusts should be removed before the ointment is applied. Soak a soft, clean cloth in lukewarm water. Press this cloth on the crusts for 10-15 minutes three or four times daily. Then gently wipe off the crusts and apply a little antibiotic ointment. You can stop soaking the Impetigo when crusts no longer form. When the skin is healed, stop the antibiotic ointment. If the Impetigo does not improve after one week, then you should return to your doctor for further medical advice.

Who is at risk from Impetigo infections?

- Potentially everyone
- Anyone with a lowered immunity or long-term illness.
- The elderly
- Babies and children

How can Impetigo be spread?

Impetigo can spread through contact with the bacteria, which is carried in the blisters and in the sores. The bacteria responsible for impetigo can be spread when a person comes into contact with the blisters or sores, either directly (by touching the impetigo) or indirectly (by touching something that has been used by the infected person, e.g., clothing, grooming items such as brushes or combs, tweezers and bedding).

How will my care change whilst in hospital?

- Impetigo is infectious when there is crusting or oozing from the sores or blisters. You will be considered infectious until you have completed 48 hours (2 days) of treatment. During this time, you will be managed using special infection control precautions.
- Regular and thorough hand hygiene is one of the most successful ways to prevent the spread of **ALL** infections.
- A sign is placed outside your door to alert hospital staff for the need to use special protective infection control precautions. This sign also alerts visitors of the need to speak with nursing staff prior to entering your room.
- The hospital staff will wear protective apparel such as gloves and an apron or gown when they enter your room. These items are disposed of in a separate waste bin as the staff member leaves your room.
- You will be allocated a private room with your own en-suite facilities. We ask that your movement throughout the ward is limited to essential movement only, such as physiotherapy. If you are unsure about when you can leave your room, please speak to the nursing staff.

Good Hand Hygiene Practices

Hand Hygiene is the most effective way to prevent **ALL** infections, including the flu and the common cold. Encourage your family and friends to learn and maintain good hand hygiene practices every day.

Please refer to the hand hygiene information in the patient information booklet or hand hygiene leaflet available from the Infection Prevention and Control team.

During your stay in hospital, you may have seen the staff using an alcohol-based hand rub, as an alternative to soap and water. Alcohol-based hand rubs or gels can be used for hand hygiene as long

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as your hands are not visibly soiled/dirty. There is a variety of brands on the market and available for purchase at most pharmacies. You may choose to use this type of product at home.

Can I still have visitors?

Yes - You may still have visitors; however, visitors should not visit if they have any open skin conditions. The nursing staff will educate your visitors on the need to perform hand hygiene before entering your room and when they leave your room. We would appreciate it if you would also encourage your visitors to perform this hand hygiene, as this is the most effective way to prevent any infection.

In some situations, your visitors may be asked to wear gloves, apron, or gowns to protect themselves from infection. If this is required, the nursing staff will direct your visitors in applying these items.

What happens when I go home?

- When you return home, it is important for you, your family, and your friends to continue good hand hygiene practices.
- If sharing a bed with a partner, it is important to have your impetigo well covered with a dry dressing.
- Do not share towels or clothing.
- Children should not go to childcare or school until they have had a full 24 hours of treatment.
- It is important that anyone assisting you for the washing of clothes, linen, crockery and cutlery or for the cleaning of the bath, toilet and shower wear gloves until your impetigo has fully healed i.e., the spots are dry and scabbed over.

Where can I get further information?

You can talk to your doctor or the nursing staff. If you wish to speak with the Infection Control Department, ask your nurse to contact us. Our office hours are 8am to 4pm Monday to Friday. Our contact numbers are (02) 9480 9433 or (02) 9480 9732.

Alternatively contact your Local Public Health Unit 1300 066 055

References

NSW Dept of Health; Communicable Diseases Factsheets – Impetigo (March 2017)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); Infectious Diseases Factsheet – Impetigo: All you need to know (July 15, 2021)

NSW Dept of Health; Infection Prevention and Control Policy PD2017_013

National Health and Medical Research Council; Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infection in Healthcare (2019)