

IMPETIGO

What Causes Impetigo?

Impetigo is a skin infection caused by germs. It is most common in children and is contagious. Impetigo forms round, crusted, oozing spots that grow larger day by day. The hands and face are the favorite locations for impetigo, but it often appears on other parts of the body.

How does one get impetigo? While the germs causing impetigo may have been caught from someone else with impetigo or boils, impetigo usually begins out of the blue, without any apparent source of infection.

Treatment

When there are only a few spots, impetigo is best treated by applying mupirocin (trade name: Bactroban) ointment four times a day to every spot of impetigo. If you have thick crusts (scabs), it helps to remove them before applying the mupirocin. To loosen the crusts, apply a cloth wet with lukewarm water for 5 to 10 minutes, and then gently wipe off the crusts with a tissue. Next, apply a thin layer of mupirocin ointment to every spot of impetigo. Continue to apply the ointment until the skin has healed. You must use mupirocin ointment, because other antibiotic ointments are not effective.

When impetigo is widespread, it is best treated with antibiotics taken by mouth. It's important that you take the antibiotic until the prescribed supply is completely used up. If there is a lot of crusting, remove the crusts with water described previously. If the crusts dry out and crack, apply _____ Ointment; it can be purchased without a prescription.

Contagion

Impetigo is contagious when there is crusting or oozing. While it's contagious, take the following precautions:

1. Patients should avoid close contact with other people.
2. Children should be kept home from school for 1 to 2 days after beginning treatment.
3. Use separate towels for the patient. Towels, pillowcases, and sheets should be changed after the first day of treatment. The patient's clothing should be changed and laundered daily for the first 2 days.

These measures are necessary only during the contagious (crusting or oozing) stage of impetigo. Usually, the contagious period ends within 2 days after treatment starts. Then children can return to school, and special laundering and other precautions can be stopped. If the impetigo does not heal in 1 week, please return to this office for evaluation.