

## THE SKIN INFECTION CALLED INPETIGO

Impetigo is the name given to one of the many types of skin infection caused by two groups of bacteria. The bacteria are the Staphylococci and the Streptococci.

Impetigo usually starts around the mouth or nose because here the skin is easily damaged which allows bacteria to cause infection.

Impetigo starts as a small spot. The skin becomes red around the spot. The redness then spreads and pustules develop which become yellow-brown scabs. Often liquid weeps from the pustules. The infected area is usually small although it can cover several square centimetres at the corners of the mouth and other parts of the body.

Impetigo infections usually starts because skin is damaged. Perhaps the damage is from an insect bite, scratch or cut. Perhaps a child has scratched an itchy spot which then becomes infected.

Impetigo is more likely to spread amongst children than adults. Spread amongst children can occur when there are many children living close together. Spread of the bacteria in school is unlikely so there is little point excluding children from school if parents are able to treat the infections. Old guidelines on health of children in schools often recommended keeping a child away from school if impetigo was diagnosed. Nowadays with families having good facilities for washing and availability of antibiotic treatment school exclusion is unnecessary.

Some Impetigo infections will clear up simply by keeping the skin clean and dry. General practitioners may decide on treatment using a cream or antibiotic taken by mouth. The type of treatment, if any, will depend on how severe the infection is, other health problems a child may have and whether the child comes from a large family where spread is possible.

The bacteria causing Impetigo are spread from person to person. For example: a hand scratches an itchy pustule; the infected hand now scratches another part of the body or scratches someone else. Liquid from pustule on one person comes into contact with the damage skin of someone else. Cleanliness is therefore important to prevent the spread of infection. Hand washing is important particularly if fluid is wiped away from pustules. Tissues and swabs used to clean the skin or apply creams should be thrown away in rubbish bins and not left lying about. Children with Impetigo should be encouraged to keep their faces and hands clean.