



Official reprint from UpToDate®

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What is impetigo? — Impetigo is a skin infection that usually affects children. It can happen if bacteria (germs) get into cuts, scrapes, or other small openings in the skin.

Impetigo is most common when the weather is warm and humid. It spreads easily between people who live together or spend a lot of time together.

What are the symptoms of impetigo? — Impetigo causes red bumps on the skin, usually on the face, arms, or legs. These bumps go on to form blisters that then burst and scab over. The scabs form a yellow, gold, or brown crust ([picture 1](#)). In some cases, the blisters leave painful sores with red rims ([picture 2](#)).

How do I know if I have impetigo? — Your doctor or nurse will probably be able to tell just by looking at your skin. It's possible that your doctor or nurse will take samples of pus from one of your blisters. That way he or she can test the pus. But that is not always necessary.

How is impetigo treated? — That depends on how bad your infection is. You might need an antibiotic cream or ointment, or you might need antibiotic pills.

If you have just a few affected spots that do not go deep into the skin, you might just need a cream or ointment. But if a lot of your skin is affected, or the infection goes deep, you might need antibiotic pills.

The antibiotic ointment experts recommend for impetigo is a prescription medicine called [mupirocin](#) (sample brand name: Bactroban) or [retapamulin](#) (sample brand name: Altabax). You must put this medicine on the infected parts of your skin. Be sure to do this for as long as your doctor or nurse tells you to. Otherwise, the infection could come back.

If your doctor or nurse gives you antibiotic pills, you will probably have to take them for 7 days or longer. Take all the antibiotics prescribed to you, even if your skin clears up before you finish the medicine.

Can I keep from getting impetigo again? — The best way to keep from spreading or catching impetigo is to wash your hands often with soap and water. When washing is not possible, use alcohol-based hand rubs. It's also a good idea to clean the surfaces in your home with a household cleaner.

More on this topic[Patient education: Impetigo \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

All topics are updated as new evidence becomes available and our [peer review process](#) is complete.

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GRAPHICS

Impetigo around the nose



When you have impetigo, your skin forms honey-colored crusts. It also turns red under the crusts.

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Impetigo sores



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Sometimes impetigo causes red-rimmed, painful sores on the skin.

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