

Bacterial Infection Impacts Mostly Young Children

by Paul Arco

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Parents with toddlers deal with a number of health issues – colds, allergies, gastro problems – that tend to flare up from time to time. Another problem that can crop up, but is rarely talked about, is a skin condition called impetigo (pronounced im-puh-TIE-go).

“Impetigo is a bacterial infection of the skin,” said Dr. Asma Khan, pediatrician, OSF HealthCare. “It happens, typically in younger ages, ages 2-5 is usually the prime age where we see impetigo. It is an infection caused by two main bacterias – staph or group A strep -- these are bugs that typically live in our skin. But sometimes when they are

overgrown they can cause infections. They can cause these honey crust lesions on our face, on our body and that is impetigo.”

While impetigo is most common with children, adults can get it too. The symptoms of impetigo in adults are sores that break open, ooze and then crust, usually around the nose and mouth or other areas of the body.



“Around the nose and around the mouth that is the most common presentation,” said Dr. Asma Khan, pediatrician, OSF HealthCare. “You see these little bumps that start and are a little itchy and they all of sudden turn into these honey crust lesions that almost looks like a scab and that is pretty classic impetigo.”

Impetigo is extremely contagious. It’s easily transmitted by contact or by sharing items like clothes, towels or sheets. If you currently have impetigo, it’s another reason why wearing a mask during COVID and keeping that mask clean so important.

“If you have an active lesion, you wear a mask, take the mask off, put the mask back on, you can spread it to another spot,” said Dr. Asma Khan, pediatrician, OSF HealthCare. “It’s very important we change our masks frequently, we wash our masks frequently as well and if we do have a lesion we can cover it up so we don’t spread it.”

Adults and children are at a higher risk for impetigo during hot summer months or by living in a humid climate. The risk increases if they have diabetes, a compromised immune system, or play contact sports.

The treatment for impetigo typically calls for antibiotics and a topical ointment. Dr. Khan says while impetigo can be at times uncomfortable and unsightly, symptoms usually clear up within a couple of weeks.

“Depends on how bad it is,” said Dr. Asma Khan, pediatrician, OSF HealthCare. “If it’s a mild little lesion here or there topical antibiotic is all you need so you just apply it a couple times a day for five days and within a day or two you should see improvement. For more extensive lesions, when it’s more widespread then we need an oral antibiotic for about 7 to 10 days and that should take care of it.”

Impetigo can come back. That’s why Dr. Khan stresses the importance of proper hygiene. Good handwashing and washing your face regularly can go a long way towards preventing this common infection.

For more information on impetigo, visit [OSF HealthCare](#).