

# Impetigo: antimicrobial prescribing

Information for the public

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## Impetigo: do I need antibiotics?

Impetigo is a skin infection that can spread very easily. It most often affects the face, arms and legs, causing red sores and blisters that can be itchy and painful. Impetigo can affect anyone but is most common in young children.

Using antibiotics when they are not needed means they may not work as well in the future. This is a serious health risk so NICE has written advice about when to offer antibiotics for some common conditions, including impetigo.

Because impetigo is a bacterial infection that can spread quickly, it should be treated. You may be offered an antiseptic cream, but if this is unsuitable, does not help or the infection is more severe or widespread then you should be offered antibiotics, either as a cream or tablets.

There are also things you can do yourself to help stop the infection spreading to other parts of the body or to other people (there is advice about this on the [NHS website](#)).

The infection should improve with antiseptic or antibiotic treatment. You should see your doctor if it doesn't improve after you have finished a course of treatment, if it suddenly gets much worse at any time or you feel very unwell.

If your impetigo keeps coming back your doctor might take a swab from your skin for testing to find out which type of antibiotic might work best.

## Where can I find out more?

Decisions about treatment and care are best when they are made together. Your health professionals should give you clear information, talk with you about your options and listen carefully to your views and concerns.

Read more about [making decisions about your care](#).

The NHS website has more information about:

- [impetigo](#) and
- [antibiotics](#).

We have also written information on [why antibiotics should be used wisely](#).

We wrote this guideline with health professionals and members of the public. All the decisions are based on the best research available.

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