

# Impetigo: antimicrobial prescribing

## Background

- Impetigo is a contagious bacterial infection of the skin, usually caused by *Staphylococcus aureus* infection
- Good hygiene measures help prevent spread of impetigo to other areas of the body and to other people

## Prescribing considerations

Take into account:

- that topical and oral antibiotics are both effective at treating impetigo
- the person's preferences, including practicalities of administration and possible adverse effects
- that antimicrobial resistance can develop rapidly with extended or repeated use of topical antibiotics
- local antimicrobial resistance data

## Microbiological testing

If a skin swab has been sent for microbiological testing, review and change antibiotic according to results if symptoms are not improving, using narrow-spectrum antibiotic if possible.

For impetigo that recurs frequently:

- send a skin swab for microbiological testing **and**
- consider taking a nasal swab and starting treatment for decolonisation

## Impetigo

Localised non-bullous impetigo

Initial treatment:

- consider hydrogen peroxide 1% cream
- other topical antiseptics are available for superficial skin infections, but no evidence was found
- if hydrogen peroxide is unsuitable, offer a short course of a topical antibiotic

Widespread non-bullous impetigo

Initial treatment:

- offer a short course of a topical or oral antibiotic, taking account of prescribing considerations

Bullous impetigo or systemically unwell or at high risk of complications

Initial treatment:

- offer a short course of an oral antibiotic

Advise on:

- good hygiene measures (see NICE's clinical knowledge summary on impetigo)
- seeking medical help if symptoms worsen rapidly or significantly at any time, or have not improved after treatment

Reassess if symptoms worsen rapidly or significantly, or have not improved after treatment, taking account of:

- alternative diagnoses, such as herpes simplex
- any symptoms or signs suggesting a more serious illness or condition, such as a cellulitis
- previous antibiotic use, which may have led to resistant bacteria

**If a course of hydrogen peroxide is unsuccessful, offer:**

- a short course of a topical antibiotic if impetigo remains localised **or**
- a short course of a topical or oral antibiotic if impetigo becomes widespread

**If a course of topical antibiotic is unsuccessful:**

- offer a short course of an oral antibiotic
- consider sending a skin swab for microbiological testing

**If an oral antibiotic is unsuccessful consider sending a skin swab for microbiological testing**

**Refer to hospital:**

- people with symptoms or signs of a more serious illness or condition, such as cellulitis
- people with widespread impetigo who are immunocompromised

**Consider referral or specialist advice for:**

- people with bullous impetigo, particularly babies, or with impetigo that recurs frequently
- people who are systemically unwell or at high risk of complications