
What is cellulitis?

Cellulitis is a spreading infection in the skin. It most often results from bacteria (germs) entering the skin from a wound or injury, such as a cut, scratch, animal bite or bug bite if scratched. If not treated, cellulitis can spread into the bloodstream and lymph nodes.

What are the possible symptoms?

Your child may have 1 or more of these:

- An area of skin that swells and is tender, painful or warm
- Swollen glands
- Muscle aches and chills
- Nausea and vomiting (throwing up)
- Fever (temperature of 100.4°F or higher)

What is the treatment?

Cellulitis must be treated by a healthcare provider. Some guidelines to follow include:

- The doctor will most often prescribe an antibiotic to control infection by killing the germs.
 - Give this to your child exactly as ordered.
 - Even if your child feels better, it is important they take the antibiotic for the whole time or the infection could come back.
- Have your child rest until the redness starts to fade and the skin temperature feels normal.
- Limit the movement or activity of the affected arm or leg. When possible, raise the infected area above the level of your child's heart to help decrease swelling.
- Only put warm compresses on the area if advised by the doctor.
- Give acetaminophen (Tylenol or less costly store brand) or ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil or less costly store brand) for fever or pain if advised by the doctor. Follow the directions on the box carefully, or ask your child's doctor how much medicine to give.
- **DO NOT:**
 - Give your child more than 5 doses of acetaminophen in a 24-hour period.
 - Give acetaminophen to babies younger than 3 months old without talking with your child's doctor.
 - Give ibuprofen to babies younger than 6 months old without talking with your child's doctor.
 - Give acetaminophen and ibuprofen together.
 - Give your child or teen aspirin. This could cause Reye syndrome, a rare but potentially serious condition.
- Keep the area clean with an antibacterial soap and warm water. Cover any open sores with a bandage as advised by the doctor.
- Wash your hands often to help prevent the spread of infection.

In case of an urgent concern or emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away.

Cellulitis, continued

When should I call the doctor?

Call your child's doctor if:

- The infection is not better in 2 days or gets worse. Symptoms of this may include:
 - Increased pain or swelling to the area
 - Increased redness
 - A red line or streak coming out of the sore area
- An abscess (a sore that contains pus) forms. The sore may be hard at first and then get soft or mushy.
- Symptoms suddenly get worse after a period of getting better.

Also call if your child has:

- A fever (temperature of 100.4°F or higher) that lasts more than 2 days after starting antibiotics
- Chills
- Muscle or joint pain or soreness
- A limp or is not able to put weight on the affected foot or leg

Call your child's doctor if you have any questions or concerns about how your child looks or feels.

This teaching sheet contains general information only. Talk with your child's doctor or a member of your child's healthcare team about specific care of your child.

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