

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Contagious Disease Called Impetigo Spreading On St. Croix; Dept. Of Health Issues Public Alert

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ST. CROIX -- Department of Health Acting Commissioner Juan Figueroa-Serville has activated an island-wide public health alert here due to an Impetigo outbreak, a press release Government House issued this afternoon reveals. Health officials will be conducting investigations in areas where cases have been high.

According to the release, Impetigo (im-puh-TIE-go) is a highly contagious skin infection that mainly affects infants and children. The infection usually appears as red sores on the face, especially around a child's nose and mouth. The sores burst and develop honey-colored crusts.

Impetigo may clear on its own in two to three weeks, but antibiotics can shorten the course of the disease and help prevent the spread to others. If a child has been infected, parents are encouraged to keep their children home from school until they're healed, which usually takes 24 to 48 hours after antibiotic treatment. Without antibiotics, impetigo remains contagious until the sores have vanished.

Classic signs and symptoms of impetigo involve red sores that quickly rupture, ooze for a few days and then form a yellowish-brown crust. The sores usually occur around the nose and mouth but can be spread to other areas of the body by fingers, clothing and towels. A less common form of the disorder, called bullous impetigo, may feature larger blisters that occur on the trunk or diaper area of infants and young children. A more serious form of impetigo, called ecthyma, penetrates deeper into the skin — causing painful fluid- or pus-filled sores that turn into deep ulcers.

Impetigo is spread through direct contact with infected wounds or sores on the skin. The bacteria may also be spread through contact with persons without symptoms but who carry the bacteria on their skin. Persons who carry the bacteria but have no symptoms are much less contagious.

Treating an infected person with an antibiotic for 24 hours or longer generally prevents the spread of the bacteria to others. However, it is important to complete the entire course of antibiotics as prescribed. Proper hygiene is key to stopping the spread. Ensure that hands are sanitized and washed frequently. Those who work in child care setting are also asked to take precautions against Impetigo.

Partnering agencies have been notified about the activation and all schools have received guidance on identifying the signs of impetigo.

For more information or to report a suspected case, contact DOH's Environmental Health Division at 340-718-1311.