



Cellulitis

Patient and Family Education

This teaching sheet contains general information only. Your child's doctor or a member of your child's health care team will talk with you about specific care for your child.

What is cellulitis?

Cellulitis is a spreading infection in the skin. It usually results from bacteria (germs) entering the skin from a wound or injury such as a cut, scratch, animal bite or bug bite if it is scratched.

What are the possible symptoms?

Your child may have one or more of these:

- Redness over the area
- Tenderness over the area
- Increased warmth over the area
- Swelling
- Fever (temperature over 100.3°F or 38°C) may or may not be present
- Muscle aches and chills

What is the treatment?

Some general guidelines to follow include:

- An antibiotic will be prescribed to control infection by killing the germs. Give this to your child exactly as your child's doctor orders. Give it for the whole time ordered.
- 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.
- Apply warm compresses to the area only if advised by your child's 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 your 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.
 - Alternate these medicines.
- Keep the area clean with an antibacterial soap and warm water. Cover any open sores with a bandage.

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, such as:
 - Increased pain or swelling to the area
 - Increased redness or streaking (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 become soft or mushy.
- It suddenly gets worse after a period of getting better.
- Fever lasts more than 2 days after starting antibiotics or if your child has chills.
- Muscle or joint pain or soreness.

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

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