

Cellulitis

Advice intended for parents / carers taking their child home after seeing a hospital based healthcare professional



Cellulitis is an infection of the deep layers of the skin. It can occur at any age.

Symptoms

- A spreading area of redness of the skin, which is usually warm to touch
- Pain or discomfort at the site
- Swelling of the affected area may occur
- Fever may be present

Causes

Cellulitis often follows injury to the skin, which may be minor, such as a scratch or insect bite. It can also occur following surgery. It occurs more commonly in children with an underlying skin condition (such as eczema) or in children with diabetes.

Treatment

Cellulitis usually responds well to antibiotics. Treatment with intravenous antibiotics (given into a vein) is usually only needed for more severe cases or those that have not responded to antibiotics given by mouth.

Some children who need intravenous antibiotics are admitted to hospital initially whilst others can be looked after at home. These children would come into hospital once a day for someone to look at them and for their antibiotics to be given.

The decision on when to change from intravenous to oral antibiotics (tablets or liquid) will be made by the medical team caring for your child. This will depend on how quickly your child responds to treatment (improvement in fever, pain and sometimes their blood tests) and whether your child has other health conditions. Antibiotics are usually given for a total of 7 days. You can give regular pain relief (Paracetamol or Ibuprofen) until any discomfort has improved.

What else can you do to help?

To help ease discomfort, if your child has cellulitis of the arm or leg, you can raise the affected limb on some pillows to reduce swelling. You can give regular pain relief (Paracetamol or Ibuprofen) until the pain has improved. Please note that Ibuprofen should not be used if your child has chicken pox.

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Complications

Most children recover without any complications. However, if you are concerned that your child's condition is getting worse, you should contact your discharging ward on:

Telephone number:

Things to look out for include:

- Fever
- Fast heart beat
- Fast breathing
- Changes in behaviour, such as confusion or disorientation
- Increase in pain
- Worsening or spreading of the cellulitis (redness on the skin)

Call 999 for an ambulance if you have serious concerns for your child.

Prevention of future episodes

Not all cases of cellulitis can be prevented, but steps can be taken to reduce the risk of it developing. Cuts, grazes or bites should be cleaned immediately. Keep the wound covered with a clean plaster or dressing. This will create a barrier against bacteria entering the skin.

Also remember good hand hygiene. Encourage your child to wash their hands regularly and always wash your hands when treating a wound or skin condition.

For further information on helping to keep your child healthy, see the Healthier Together website: www.what0-18.nhs.uk