PROTECT AGAINST SKIN INFECTIONS:

Tips for Students and Parents

Skin infections are common, and they can be serious if not treated properly. This list of questions and answers describes symptoms and treatment of skin infections, when to talk to a healthcare provider, and how to prevent skin infections at home and at school.

What are the symptoms of a skin infection?

Symptoms of a skin infection may include warmth, tenderness, pain, redness, swelling, itchiness, and drainage of pus or other discharge. An infection – painful, swollen pimples, boils and rashes, for example – can occur at the site of a cut, scratch, abrasion or other rash, or where there is no obvious break in the skin. Contact a doctor or other healthcare provider if you think your child has a skin infection that is spreading, getting worse or does not appear to be healing.

What causes skin infections?

Skin infections and rashes can be caused by bacteria, viruses and fungi. Allergies and other causes of skin irritation can lead to the same symptoms as a skin infection.

How are skin infections treated?

Treatment depends on the kind of skin infection. Sometimes treatment for infections caused by bacteria requires the use of antibiotics. Infections caused by fungi may be treated with anti-fungal medication. Treatment may be available for other skin infections as well. Follow your healthcare provider's instructions, and if the infection has not improved within a few days, contact your healthcare provider again.

It is always helpful to maintain good wound and skin care by keeping the area clean and dry, washing your hands after caring for the area, carefully disposing of any bandages and by allowing your body to heal.

How are skin infections spread?

Some bacteria, viruses and fungi that cause skin infections are spread by direct skin-to-skin contact. Some infections are spread by contact with items that have been touched by other people such as towels shared after bathing, or shared athletic equipment in the gym or on the field.

Some skin infections don't spread from person to person. They start when normally present bacteria, viruses or fungi get into a cut, scrape or other break in the skin. People who have skin infections should see a healthcare provider if symptoms do not improve.

How can I prevent skin infections?

- Keep cuts, abrasions, burns and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until they have healed. Watch carefully for any signs of infection.
- Avoid sharing personal items, such as towels, washcloths, toothbrushes and razors. Sharing these items may transfer bacteria, viruses and fungi from one person to another.
- Keep yourself and your skin healthy. Avoid getting dry, cracked skin, especially during the winter. Healthy skin helps keep bacteria, viruses and fungi on the surface of the skin from causing an infection underneath the skin.
- Contact a doctor or other healthcare provider if you or your child has a skin infection that does not improve.
- Wash your hands!

For more information about skin infections, visit the MDPH website at www.mass.gov/dph

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