

Cellulitis in children Advice Sheet

Advice for parents and carers



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

Symptoms of cellulitis

Common symptoms include:

- 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
- They may have swollen glands (lymph nodes) near the area of infected skin.

When should you worry?



RED

If your child has any of the following:

- Becomes pale, mottled and feels abnormally cold to touch
- Is going blue around the lips
- Too breathless to talk / eat or drink
- Has a fit/seizure
- Becomes extremely agitated (crying inconsolably despite distraction), confused or very lethargic (difficult to wake)
- Develops a rash that does not disappear with pressure (the 'Glass Test')
- Is under 3 months of age with a temperature of 38°C / 100.4°F or above (unless fever in the 48 hours following vaccinations and no other red or amber features)

You need urgent help.

Go to the nearest Hospital Emergency (A&E) Department or phone 999



AMBER

If your child has any of the following:

- Increasing pain or worsening/spreading red area
- Seems dehydrated (sunken eyes, drowsy or no urine passed for 12 hours)
- Is becoming drowsy (excessively sleepy) or irritable (unable to settle them with toys, TV, food or picking up) - especially if they remain drowsy or irritable despite their fever coming down
- Has extreme shivering or complains of muscle pain
- Is having breathing problems, such as rapid breathing, shortness of breath or laboured breathing (drawing in of muscles below the lower ribs when they breath in)
- Fever of 38.0°C or above with other symptoms/signs of cellulitis
- Is getting worse of if you are worried
- Is 3-6 months of age with a temperature of 39°C / 102.2°F or above (but fever is common in babies up to 2 days after they receive vaccinations)

You need to contact a doctor or nurse today.

Please ring your GP surgery or contact NHS 111 - dial 111 or for children aged 5 years and above visit 111.nhs.uk



GREEN

- If none of the above features are present

Self Care

Continue providing your child's care at home. If you are still concerned about your child, contact NHS 111 – dial 111 or for children aged 5 years and above visit 111.nhs.uk

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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 oral antibiotics. Your child should begin to show improvement within two to three days. Treatment with intravenous antibiotics (given into a vein) is very occasionally needed for more severe cases or those that are worsening despite antibiotics being given by mouth. Antibiotics are usually given for a total of 5 days.

If your child has any features of severe infection (amber or red features above), they will need to be urgently seen by a healthcare professional who may decide that your child may benefit from antibiotic treatment.

You can help relieve symptoms by:

- Giving your child paracetamol or ibuprofen if they are in pain or have a fever
- Encourage your child to drink plenty of fluids

Prevention

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.