Impetigo is a common, contagious skin infection that often affects children, but adults can get it too. It usually causes red sores or blisters that break and leave golden-brown crusts, often around the nose and mouth. If you think you or your child has impetigo, a community pharmacy may be able to assess it and help you get treatment without first booking a GP appointment.

In England, the NHS Pharmacy First service allows participating pharmacies to assess and treat certain common conditions, including impetigo, when the person meets the service criteria. This can mean quicker access to advice and, when appropriate, treatment. It is not a substitute for urgent medical care, and not every rash is impetigo. This guide explains what to expect, how to limit spread and when to seek help elsewhere.

## What is impetigo?

Impetigo is usually caused by bacteria entering the skin through a small cut, scratch, insect bite or area of eczema. It can also develop on skin that looks unbroken. There are two main forms: non-bullous impetigo, which tends to cause smaller sores and crusting, and bullous impetigo, which causes larger fluid-filled blisters. A pharmacist can ask about symptoms and look at the affected area to help decide whether impetigo is likely.

Impetigo spreads easily through direct skin contact, or indirectly through items such as towels, bedding and clothing. Scratching can move the infection to other areas of the body. People are generally considered less contagious once they have started appropriate treatment for 48 hours, or when the sores have dried and crusted over if treatment is not used. Follow the advice given by your pharmacist, GP or school or nursery about returning to childcare or work.

## What does NHS Pharmacy First offer for impetigo?

**NHS Pharmacy First** is an NHS service in England that enables trained community pharmacists to assess and manage certain conditions. For impetigo, the pharmacist will check whether the service is suitable and whether the symptoms fit the treatment pathway. The service is intended to make care more accessible; it does not mean every person with a rash will receive antibiotics or that every pharmacy can provide the service.

The pharmacy may ask you to attend in person, or start with a conversation about your symptoms. A private consultation area should be available for a confidential discussion. The pharmacist may ask permission to share relevant information with your GP, helping keep your care joined up. NHS England sets the national framework for Pharmacy First in England, while service availability and local arrangements can vary. Pharmacy services differ across the UK, so check the arrangements where you live.

## What happens during an impetigo pharmacy consultation?

The pharmacist will ask questions to understand what is happening and whether treatment at the pharmacy is appropriate. Be ready to explain when the rash started, where it is, whether it is spreading or painful, and whether there are blisters, crusts, fever or other symptoms. They may ask about medicines, allergies, pregnancy, other health conditions and any treatment you have already tried.

They will examine the affected skin where possible. This is not simply a quick check of whether the rash “looks like” impetigo: they also need to rule out conditions that may need a different treatment or further assessment. If the diagnosis is uncertain, the infection is severe, or the person does not meet the Pharmacy First criteria, the pharmacist can advise on the next step, which may be contacting a GP or another NHS service.

### Possible treatment and self-care

Depending on the assessment, the pharmacist may recommend self-care, supply treatment under the Pharmacy First pathway, or refer you for further care. Antibiotics are not automatically needed for every case. If an antibiotic is appropriate, the choice depends on the clinical assessment and the pathway's rules. Use any prescribed or supplied medicine exactly as directed, complete the course if instructed, and ask the pharmacist if you are unsure about how to apply or take it.




Useful steps to reduce irritation and spread include:

- Wash your hands regularly, especially after touching the affected skin or applying treatment.
- Gently clean the sores as advised, and avoid picking at crusts or blisters.
- Use separate towels and flannels, and do not share them with other people.
- Wash clothing, towels and bedding that have touched the affected area, where practical.
- Keep fingernails short and try to discourage scratching.
- Cover affected areas loosely if advised and if this can be done comfortably.

Do not use leftover antibiotics or someone else's medicine. An antibiotic that was suitable for a previous infection may not be right for this one. If treatment is started and the skin is getting worse, or there is no improvement within the timeframe the pharmacist gives you, contact the pharmacy or seek further medical advice.

## When should you seek urgent help?

Pharmacy First is for people whose symptoms are suitable for assessment through the pathway. Seek urgent medical advice if the person seems very unwell, the infection is spreading rapidly, there is significant pain or swelling, or there is a high temperature. A rash near the eye, extensive blistering, or symptoms in someone with a weakened immune system may also need prompt assessment. Call 999 or go to A&E for a life-threatening emergency; use NHS 111 or contact a GP urgently if you are unsure what to do.



Very young babies and people with complex health needs may require a different route of care. If a pharmacist recommends referral, it is because they believe another service is better placed to assess or treat the problem—not because you have done anything wrong.

## Impetigo pharmacy treatment: quick overview

What may happen What it means Questions and skin assessment The pharmacist checks symptoms, health factors and whether impetigo is likely. Self-care advice You may be given steps to protect the skin and reduce the chance of passing infection on. Treatment, if appropriate The pharmacist may supply treatment under the service pathway when the assessment supports it. Referral You may be directed to a GP or another service if the case is unsuitable for pharmacy care or needs further assessment.

## Community pharmacy does more than dispense medicines

For many people, a pharmacy is the most convenient first point of contact for a straightforward health concern. Community pharmacists can provide advice on common conditions, help people understand how to use medicines and, through NHS services such as Pharmacy First in England, assess some problems that might otherwise have required a GP appointment. Depending on the pharmacy and local arrangements, services may include support for conditions such as sore throat, earache, infected insect bites, sinusitis and urinary tract infection, as well as impetigo.

These services can improve access, but they do not mean pharmacists replace GPs. The pharmacist's role is to assess the concern within the scope of the service, give appropriate advice or treatment, and refer on when needed. Pretty simple.. If you have several health concerns, a long-term condition or symptoms that do not fit a specific service, a GP or another clinician may be the right person to provide ongoing care.

## Vaccinations and travel health at pharmacies

Many community pharmacies also offer vaccinations and travel health services, although what is available healthylifeessex.co.uk depends on the pharmacy, season and local arrangements. This may include **flu vaccinations** and, at some locations, **travel vaccinations**. A pharmacy may also provide **travel health**

**consultations with risk assessment**, where a clinician discusses your destination, planned activities, medical history and existing vaccinations to help identify what advice or protection may be suitable.

It is sensible to plan travel health advice well before departure, as some vaccinations need more than one dose or time to take effect. Check directly with a pharmacy about the services it provides, appointment arrangements and whether you need to bring vaccination records. A travel consultation is separate from an impetigo assessment, but both illustrate how community pharmacies can support health needs beyond dispensing prescriptions.

## Cost and eligibility: what should you expect?

**No prices were stated in the scraped content**, so it would be misleading to quote a fee here or assume that every pharmacy charges the same amount. The NHS Pharmacy First service in England is an NHS service for eligible patients, but the rules and any charges for medicines can depend on the service, the person's circumstances and the item supplied. Private travel health appointments and vaccinations may have separate charges, and availability varies.

Before booking or accepting a private service, ask the pharmacy what is included, whether there is a consultation fee, and whether each vaccination or medicine is charged separately. If you are unsure whether your impetigo concern can be dealt with through NHS Pharmacy First, ask the pharmacy to explain the eligibility and referral options. This avoids relying on an unverified online price or assuming that a service is available at every branch.

## How to make the most of a pharmacy visit

A little preparation can help the pharmacist assess the problem efficiently. You could bring a list of medicines and allergies, note when the rash began and how it has changed, and mention any treatments already used. If the affected person is a child, be ready to describe their general health and whether they have a fever or are behaving unusually. You can also ask for a private consultation if you would rather discuss the issue away from the counter.

1. Check whether your local pharmacy offers NHS Pharmacy First and can assess impetigo.
2. Explain the symptoms clearly, including any spread, pain, fever or previous episodes.
3. Follow the pharmacist's treatment and hygiene advice, and ask if any instructions are unclear.
4. Seek further care if symptoms worsen, do not improve as expected or the pharmacist advises referral.

## Impetigo advice UK: the key points

For many straightforward cases, a community pharmacy can be a practical first stop for **impetigo advice in the UK**. In England, NHS Pharmacy First may allow an eligible person to be assessed and treated by a pharmacist without first seeing a GP. The pharmacist will decide whether the pathway is suitable; treatment might involve self-care advice, medicine or referral, depending on the individual assessment.

Look out for worsening or severe symptoms, follow advice on reducing spread, and do not use leftover antibiotics. If you are uncertain, contact a pharmacist, GP or NHS 111 for guidance. Pharmacy services are expanding beyond dispensing, but their most important contribution is helping people access the right care—and recognising when another service is needed.