

What causes a skin infection or abscess?

Skin infections can start when germs on the skin get into a cut, scrape or wound. Some infections get more painful, swollen, and fill with pus. This is called an abscess. Sometimes it is called a boil.

How is an abscess treated?

- Sometimes fluid in an abscess may drain on its own. Your doctor may open it. Your doctor will talk to you about this if it is needed.
- Most abscesses will need antibiotics (medicines) to treat the infection. Some skin infections need both antibiotics and draining.
- Make sure your child takes all of the medicine, even if the wound looks better. This is to make sure the abscess is gone.

What care does my child need?

Special care may be needed for an open abscess.

- Wash your hands often. Always wash before and after changing a bandage. This keeps germs from spreading to other places on the body.
- Keep the wound covered. Change the dressing at least once a day or when you see drainage on the bandage. If items that touched the wound cannot be cleaned, throw them away in a separate bag.
- Change towels and linens daily if possible.
- All non-clothing items that touch the wound need to be cleaned. Use a freshly mixed disinfecting solution. Mix 1 tablespoon of bleach with one quart of water. A phenol-containing product such as Lysol® or Pine-sol® can also be used.
- Be sure your child does not have close contact with others until the drainage stops.

Your child's doctor will tell you when they may return to school and normal activities. Your child should not swim for 10 days.

When should my child be seen for a follow-up visit?

Your child needs to be seen if the abscess has more pus or gets red, warm, swollen or tender. Call your doctor if your child gets a fever or has new abscesses.

Other teaching sheets that may be helpful

Wound care #[2040](#)

Scars and wound healing #[1182](#)

Caring for a laceration #[1519](#)

ALERT: Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any questions or concerns or if your child has special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

This sheet was created to help you care for your child or family member. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment and follow-up.