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CELLULITIS

What is cellulitis?

Cellulitis is an infected area of skin showing signs of redness, pain, warmth, and swelling. Sometimes there is swelling of nearby lymph nodes or red streaking from the infected area. If not treated, the infection may spread to deeper tissues or into the bloodstream.

What is the cause?

The infection of the skin and underlying tissues is caused by bacteria that may enter the skin after an animal bite, insect bite or sting, cut, scratch, splinter, puncture, burn, or other type of wound. Sometimes there is no wound and the bacteria come from the bloodstream. Cellulitis can occur on any part of the body.

What is the treatment?

- **Antibiotics** Your child's antibiotic is _____. Give _____ every _____ hours for _____ days. The antibiotic should be completed as prescribed and should not be stopped even if the symptoms are going away.
- **Heat and elevation** Apply a warm, moist towel or heating pad to the reddened, affected area three times a day for 20 minutes at a time. Elevate the area as much as possible on pillows above the level of the heart to decrease swelling and pain.
- **Pain control** Children's acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Motrin or Advil) may be given for pain or fever over 102°F (38.9°C).

How can cellulitis be prevented?

Whenever your child has any type of skin wound, it is very important to keep the area as clean as possible. The best method for cleaning a wound is to place the injured area under running water for several minutes. Then cover the wounded with an antibiotic ointment such as Neosporin or bacitracin.

If you suspect that your child has cellulitis, seek treatment early. If you notice your child has red, swollen, warm, painful skin, even if you do not see a recent wound, see your physician that day.

When should I call my child's health care provider?

Call IMMEDIATELY if:

- The swelling, redness, pain, or warmth spreads or worsens.
- Red streaks develop from the infected area.
- Your child is lethargic (sluggish) or irritable.
- Your child starts to act very sick.

Call within 24 hours if:

- Your child still has a fever 48 hours after he or she started taking the antibiotic.
- Your child is unable to drink fluids or keep the antibiotic down.
- The swelling, redness, pain, or warmth is still there 48 hours after your child started taking the antibiotic.
- You have other questions or concerns.