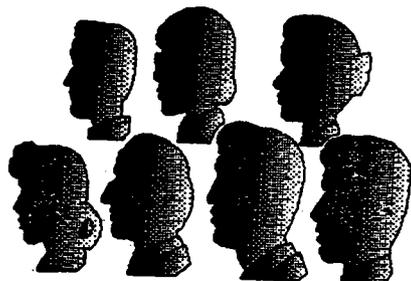




# Just the Facts

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## ...About Skin and Scalp Diseases



A variety of conditions can cause changes in the skin and scalp. Some of the conditions are harmless and go away without treatment, while others can pass from person to person and may require treatment by a physician. This fact sheet addresses some of the more common conditions which can be contagious. Since barber and beauty shop employees may encounter these conditions, we suggest that each Preventive Medicine Service coordinate with barbers and beauticians to establish a local policy for the refusal of service to customers who may have these conditions. You may choose to use this fact sheet as part of your policy.

### Severe Acne, Abscesses, Boils

Mild acne is not contagious. Boils (or abscesses) can occur with severe acne or can form for other reasons. A boil or abscess is a localized swelling that is red, warm and tender to the touch. Boils eventually drain pus, while abscesses are more like closed pockets. A bacteria called *Staphylococcus aureus* usually causes boils or abscesses, which may require treatment by a physician depending on the severity. The bacteria from a boil can spread and may contaminate food if handwashing does not follow contact with a boil.

### Head Lice

Head lice are tiny insects that live on the scalp and lay eggs, called nits. The nits stick to hair very close to the scalp. Head lice can spread from person to person by direct contact or on items such as hats, combs, hairbrushes, towels and headphones. Specific products sold over-the-counter can treat head lice.

### Herpes Simplex Infections

Herpes infections of the skin are caused by a virus. Grouped blisters, filled with clear liquid, form on a red base of skin. The blister fluid contains infectious virus. After the blisters break, an ulcer-like sore forms. Spread occurs by contact with the virus, usually through the blister fluid. The virus can live for a few hours on surfaces, but this is probably not a major source of spread. Some medications available from physicians can help this condition.

- ◆ Preventive Medicine Service  
Barbers and Beauticians
- ◆ Information/Guidance
- ◆ Communicable Conditions

For additional information contact your local health consultant or health care provider.

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## **Superficial Fungal Infections**

A number of fungi can live on the skin, and different fungi cause different conditions. The most common fungal infection of the scalp is called ringworm (*tinea corporis*). The fungus causes reddish, dry, scaly patches, although not necessarily in a ring shape. Ringworm can be spread by contact with the lesions or with the towels, hats or combs, etc., of infected persons. A prescription cream can treat ringworm.

## **Impetigo**

A bacterial skin disease, impetigo usually starts as a fluid- or pus-filled blister that breaks. A gold crust then forms. Impetigo can spread by direct contact with lesions and, occasionally, by way of clothing or towels. Careful handwashing and not touching the lesions on the skin can prevent impetigo. After evaluation by a physician, an antibiotic treatment applied to the skin or oral antibiotics can treat impetigo.

## **Scabies**

Tiny insects called mites cause scabies. The mites burrow into the skin and cause a very itchy rash that often looks like tiny red bumps or scratches. Scabies spreads from person to person by touch or by contact with the towels, clothing, etc., of someone who has scabies. A medication prescribed by a physician can treat scabies.

## **Rashes**

Many forms and causes of rash exist. Some infectious diseases, such as mumps, measles, rubella, and chickenpox, usually cause rashes covering large areas of the body. Eczema, seborrhea, overexposure to sun, and allergic reactions can cause rashes that are not contagious. It is difficult for someone who is not a health care provider to be certain of the cause of a rash. For this reason, schools and child care centers often do not allow children with rashes to be around other children until the cause of the rash is known. If a contagious rash is suspected, contact with others (e.g., haircuts) should be avoided until after an evaluation by a physician.

## **Open Wounds**

While open wounds are not contagious unless they are draining or infected, bleeding wounds can be a source of blood. If others come in contact with that blood, they may be at risk for diseases carried in the blood, such as those caused by the Human Immunodeficiency Virus or Hepatitis B Virus.