



Calderdale and Huddersfield

NHS Foundation Trust

Patient Information Leaflet

Cellulitis

What is cellulitis?

Cellulitis is a bacterial infection of the skin and the tissues underneath it. It usually affects the lower legs but can occur anywhere on the body.

The skin becomes:

- Red
- Warm
- Swollen
- Painful or tender

Sometimes the redness spreads quickly.

What causes cellulitis?

Cellulitis happens when bacteria enter the skin through a break, such as:

- A cut or scratch
- Insect bites or stings
- Ulcers or wounds
- Fungal infections (e.g. athlete's foot)
- Dry or cracked skin
- Underlying conditions that reduce your immunity, such as diabetes

It is not usually contagious.

Symptoms

You may notice:

- Increasing redness of the skin
- Swelling
- Pain or tenderness or tightness
- Warmth in the affected area
- Fever or chills

- Feeling generally unwell

In more severe cases, red streaks may spread from the affected area.

Treatment options

Antibiotics: Cellulitis is treated with antibiotics.

Benefits: Treats the infection and prevents complications.

Risks: Possible side effects include diarrhoea, rash or allergic reactions.

Oral antibiotics (tablets) are commonly prescribed. Intravenous (IV) antibiotics may be required if the infection is more severe.

It is important to complete the full course of antibiotics even if you start to feel better.

What you can do to help

- Rest and keep the affected area elevated (especially legs)
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Take regular pain relief such as paracetamol (if suitable for you)
- Keep the skin clean and dry
- Mark the edge of redness with a pen to monitor if it spreads
- Avoid scratching or damaging the skin

Possible complications

Short-term: Abscess (collection of pus), blood infection (sepsis), and spread of infection to deeper tissues.

Early treatment greatly reduces these risks.

When should I seek help?

Seek urgent medical attention if you notice:

- Rapidly spreading redness
- Increasing pain or swelling
- High fever or chills
- Feeling very unwell or confused
- No improvement after 48 hours of antibiotics
- New blisters, blackened skin or severe pain

See your GP for ongoing follow-up and complete your prescribed course of antibiotics.

Contact information

If you have concerns after leaving SDEC, please contact:

SDEC / Hospital Advice Line: _____

GP: _____

Out of hours: NHS 111

In an emergency, call 999.

