

Idaho Falls Pediatrics

Fingernail Infection (Paronychia)

What is a fingernail infection?

A fingernail infection is an infection at the base of the fingernail caused by bacteria or yeast.

Your child will probably have:

- a large pimple at the junction of the cuticle and the fingernail
- redness and tenderness of this area
- occasionally, pus draining from this area.

What is the cause?

If the cuticle has a large pimple or is draining pus, it is usually infected with the *Staphylococcus* bacteria. The bacteria usually enters the skin through a break in the skin caused by pulling on or chewing on the cuticle. If the cuticle area is only red and swollen without pus, it is usually due to *Candida* (yeast). Yeast infections usually occur in children that suck their thumb or finger, swim a lot, or have waterlogged cuticles from other activities.

How long will it last?

With proper treatment, this infection should clear up in 7 days. If not, your doctor will probably prescribe an oral antibiotic.

How can I take care of my child?

- **Antiseptic soaks**

If the cause is bacteria, soak the infected finger three times a day for 10 minutes in warm water and liquid antibacterial soap. Do this for 4 days, or longer if the wound has not healed.

- **Antibiotic ointments (for bacterial infection)**

Apply an antibiotic ointment 6 times a day. Cover it with an adhesive bandage. Continue to apply the antibiotic ointment until no signs of infection remain.

- **Open any large pimple**

Open and drain any visible pus pocket using a needle sterilized with rubbing alcohol or a flame. Make a large opening where the pus pocket joins with the nail. If the pus doesn't run out, gently squeeze the pus pocket.

- **Yeast (Candida) infections**

For yeast infections apply the medicine prescribed by your health care provider 3 times daily. Also, keep the area dry. Do not cover it with a bandage.

- **Prevention**

Discourage any picking or chewing of hangnails (loose pieces of cuticle). Instead, cut these off with nail clippers.

When should I call Idaho Falls Pediatrics?

Call IMMEDIATELY if:

- Your child gets a fever.
- A red streak spreads beyond the cuticle.

Call during office hours if:

- The infection has not improved after 48 hours on home treatment.
- The infection is not totally cleared up by 7 days.
- You have other concerns or questions.

*NOTE: This information is provided as a public educational service. The information does not replace any of the instructions your physician gives you. If you have a medical emergency please call 911 or call the Hospital at (208) 529-6111. If you have questions about your child's care, please call Idaho Falls Pediatrics at (208) 522-4600.