

# Staphylococcus Skin Infection FACTSHEET

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## What is *Staphylococcus aureus*?

Staphylococcus bacteria, also commonly called Staph (pronounced *staff*), are bacteria that live harmlessly on many skin surfaces, especially around the nose, mouth, genitals, and rectum. When the skin is broken for any reason, Staphylococcus bacteria can enter the wound and cause infection. Staphylococcus bacteria can cause minor skin or soft tissue infection such as boils, as well as more serious infections such as wound infections, abscesses, pneumonia, and sepsis.

About 20-30% of healthy people carry Staphylococcus bacteria in their noses at various times, without getting sick. Fingers can carry Staphylococcus bacteria from one area of the body to another to cause infections in wounds or broken skin.

Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) are Staphylococcus bacteria that have become resistant to certain antibiotics such as penicillin, ampicillin, amoxicillin, augmentin, methicillin, oxacillin, dicloxacillin, cephalosporins, barbapenems, and monobactams. Because of their resistance to some antibiotics, MRSA may be more difficult to treat and possibly lead to more serious infections like pneumonia and bloodstream infections.

Staphylococcus infections are a worldwide occurrence and usually happen in areas where hygiene conditions are suboptimal and people are crowded. The infection occurs sporadically and individuals can have recurrent infections.

## How do Staphylococcus infections spread?

Anyone can get a Staphylococcus infection. People are more likely to get a Staphylococcus infection if they have:

- Skin-to-skin contact with someone who has a Staphylococcus infection
- Contact with items and surfaces that have Staphylococcus on them, such as shared workout and sports equipment, towels, razors and sheets
- Openings in their skin such as cuts or scrapes
- Crowded living conditions
- Poor personal hygiene

## How is a Staphylococcus infection treated?

A Staphylococcus infection can be diagnosed by a physician. Taking any antibiotics before seeing a physician should be avoided. If a Staphylococcus infection is detected, an antibiotic is usually prescribed by the physician. If the infection is determined to be MRSA, the physician may prescribe a different antibiotic or treatment. The patient should be sure to follow the full course of treatment as prescribed by the physician. It is very important that the patient follow all of the physician's treatment instructions!

## Should schools close because of an MRSA infection?

The decision to close a school for any communicable disease should be made by school officials in consultation with public health officials. However, in most cases, it is not necessary to close schools because of an MRSA infection in a student or staff member. It is important to note that MRSA transmission can be prevented by simple measures such as hand hygiene and covering infections (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).

## Should students with MRSA skin infections be excluded from attending school?

Unless directed by a physician, students with MRSA infections should not be excluded from attending school (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).

## How does one prevent the spread of Staphylococcus infections?

Hand washing is the most important way to prevent Staphylococcus (and other) infections from passing from person-to-person.

- Wash hands with soap and running water for at least 20 seconds.
- Keep your cuts and scrapes clean and cover them with bandages
- Do not touch other people's cuts or bandages
- Do not share personal items like towels or razors
- Thoroughly clean shared sports and workout equipment after every use

## Want more information?

Information about Staphylococcus infections and other related health topics can be found at the website [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov). The DC Department of Health promotes the health and safety of the District residents. For additional information, please call (202) 442-9371.

