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Gram stain of skin lesion

A Gram stain of a skin lesion is a lab test that uses special stains to detect and identify bacteria in a sample from the skin. The Gram stain method is one of the most commonly used techniques to quickly diagnose bacterial infections.

How the Test is Performed

Your health care provider will remove a sample of tissue from the skin sore (lesion). This can be done with a simple swab, a needle or syringe, or with a biopsy. If you have a biopsy, your provider will numb the area of skin so you don't feel anything.

The sample is sent to a lab. There, it is applied in a very thin layer to a glass slide. A series of different colored stains are applied to the sample. The stained slide is examined under a microscope to check for bacteria. The color, size, shape, and organization of the cells help identify the germ causing the infection.

How to Prepare for the Test

No preparation is needed for the lab test.

How the Test will Feel

There will be a sting when the anesthetic is given. You should only feel pressure or discomfort similar to a pinprick during the biopsy.

Why the Test is Performed

Your provider may order this test if you have signs of an infected skin sore. The test is done to determine which bacteria caused the infection.

Normal Results

A normal result means no bacteria are present on the Gram stain. Other tests may be done to help diagnose the problem.

What Abnormal Results Mean

An abnormal result means bacteria have been found in the skin lesion. Further tests may be needed to confirm the results. This allows your provider to prescribe the appropriate antibiotic or other treatment.

Risks

Risks of a skin biopsy may include:

- Infection
- Scar

You will bleed slightly during the procedure.

Considerations

A skin or mucosal culture may be done along with this test. Other studies are often done on a skin sample to determine if cancer is present.

Viral skin lesions, such as herpes simplex, are examined by other tests or a viral culture.

Alternative Names

Skin lesion Gram stain

References

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Updated by: Frank D. Brodkey, MD, FCCM, Associate Professor, Section of Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine, University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health, Madison, WI. Also reviewed by David C. Dugdale, MD, Medical Director, Brenda Conaway, Editorial Director, and the A.D.A.M. Editorial team.