

Staphylococcus aureus (Staph) and Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) Fact Sheet

Staphylococcus aureus, or “staph”, is a common type of bacteria

Staphylococcus aureus is commonly found on the skin and in the nose of about 30% of individuals. Most of the time, staph does not cause any harm, but it can sometimes cause infections. Usually, these infections are skin infections, like pimples and abscesses. More serious staph infections can result in pneumonia or bloodstream infections.

Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, or “MRSA”, is a type of staph bacteria resistant to several common antibiotics. MRSA infections may be harder to treat, but most are still treatable with appropriate medical care.

Staph and MRSA spread from person to person by direct and indirect contact

Staph and MRSA spread from person to person through direct skin-to-skin contact, such as shaking hands, wrestling, or other direct contact with the skin of another person. Staph bacteria can also spread when you touch items or surfaces that have been touched by people with staph, such as shared athletic equipment or towels.

Many people carry staph on their skin or in their nose without symptoms and can still spread the bacteria to others. Infection usually occurs when the bacteria enter through a break in the skin, such as a cut or scrape.

Some factors put you at greater risk for staph infections

You are at greater risk of getting a staph infection if you have a chronic medical condition, such as diabetes, cancer, or vascular disease. Participating in some activities can also put you at greater risk of a staph infection, even if you don’t have a chronic medical condition. These activities include:

- Participating in sports
- Attending daycare or school
- Living in a military barracks or dormitory
- Receiving inpatient medical care
- Having a surgery or a medical device inserted in your body
- Injecting drugs

People who have a staph skin infection may have a pimple, boil, or abscess

Symptoms of a staph infection depend on the part of the body that is infected. For infected wounds, like cuts and scrapes, a common site of a staph infection, symptoms include a wound that is:

- Red
- Swollen
- Painful
- Warm to the touch
- Full of pus or other drainage
- Accompanied by a fever

Symptoms usually appear 4 to 10 days after exposure, but this can vary widely depending on several factors.

Cover the infected area with a bandage and contact a healthcare provider

Most skin infections resolve without treatment; however, some infections may require incision and drainage or antibiotic treatment. Lab tests help your healthcare provider decide which antibiotic to use for treatment, if treatment is needed. The only way to tell the difference between staph or MRSA and other germs is with a lab test.

If symptoms worsen or do not improve after a few days, follow up with your healthcare provider.

Prevent spreading staph skin infections, including MRSA, to others by following these steps:

- Keep wounds that are draining or have pus covered with clean, dry bandages until healed
- Clean your hands frequently with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub
- Avoid sharing personal items such as towels, washcloths, razors, clothing, toys, and medical supplies
- Avoid contact with other people’s wounds or bandages
- Maintain a clean environment by cleaning frequently touched surfaces
- See a healthcare provider if you think you have a staph or MRSA infection