

# *Staphylococcus aureus* (Staph)

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## What is *Staphylococcus aureus* (Staph)?

Staph is a type of bacteria commonly carried on the skin or nose of healthy people. Staph is a common cause of minor skin infections, and occasionally causes serious infections like surgical wound infections and pneumonia.

## How do I get staph?

Staph can be present in the body without causing illness; this is called “colonization.” At any given time, 25% to 30% of the general population are colonized with staph bacteria. Staph bacteria are spread by contact with the hands, skin drainage or secretions from the nose of a person who is infected or colonized. Persons who have draining infections are shedding more bacteria and are more infectious than persons who are colonized only. Direct skin-to-skin contact is the most common mode of transmission.

## Symptoms

Symptoms of staph vary, depending on the part of the body that is infected. Symptoms may include:

- Skin infections (the most common site of staph infections) that typically result in local redness and warmth of the infected area with or without pus.
- Boils or small, white-headed pimples around hair follicles.
- Blistering and peeling skin in infants and young children.
- Swollen lymph nodes in the neck, armpits or groin.

## Prevention

- Hand washing is the most effective way to prevent the spread of staph. Persons should wash their hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water after having contact with secretions from the nose, mouth or skin drainage of an infected or colonized person.
- Wash all cuts, scratches and wounds with antiseptic soap; keep them clean and covered during healing.
- Avoid sharing personal items with others, such as towels and razors.

## Treatment for staph

- If you think you have a staph infection, contact a healthcare provider immediately. When caught early, a staph infection is easily treated with topical antibiotic ointment. If the infection is more extensive, oral antibiotics may be required.
- If you are recovering from a staph infection, have someone else prepare food to avoid spreading the infection to others.

## What is Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA)?

MRSA refers to staph bacteria that has become resistant to some antibiotics, which may make the infections more difficult to treat. Effective antibiotics may not be prescribed until the results of culture and antibiotic susceptibility testing are known, this delay can allow the infection to progress. MRSA infections occur most often in people who are hospitalized or spend time in health care settings; but can also occur in persons outside of these settings.

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### Hand washing steps:

1. Use soap and warm running water.
2. Scrub hands for at least 20 seconds; use a nail brush.
3. Wash all surfaces:
  - Between fingers
  - Under fingernails
  - Back of hands
  - Wrists
4. Rinse well and dry hands with a clean paper towel.

## *Staph (continued)*

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### **What is a staph foodborne illness?**

The staph bacteria can also cause food poisoning caused by a staph toxin when a person ingests food contaminated with the bacteria. Symptoms of staph food poisoning occur rapidly (usually 2-4 hours after ingestion). The most common symptoms are a violent onset of nausea, vomiting, abdominal cramping and exhaustion. In more severe cases, headache, muscle cramping and changes in blood pressure and pulse may occur. Recovery usually takes two days; treatment consists of replacing fluids to prevent dehydration from diarrhea and vomiting.