

**What is a staph infection?**

Staph is a bacteria (called Staphylococcus) that about 30% of people carry in their noses. Sometimes it does not cause any problems; sometimes it causes minor infections, such as pimples or boils, but it can also enter the blood stream or other areas and cause more serious infections. Staph skin infections often begin with an injury to the skin. Staph enters the skin weakened by the injury and develops into an infection. In humans the most important of these pathogens is Staphylococcus aureus. Clinical symptoms can range from skin lesions to sepsis and death.

**Who is at risk for a staph infections?**

Anyone can become infected by a staph bacteria. However those at higher risk for severe infections include:

- People with chronic conditions such as diabetes
- People with liver disease
- People who have had recent surgery
- People with foreign parts such as catheters, pacemakers, or even grafts
- People with decreased immune systems such as those with HIV/AIDS or cancers

**What are the symptoms of a staph infection?**

Symptoms may vary. Depending upon the site of infection (skin, heart, lungs or joints), symptoms may range from skin lesions, fever, extreme tiredness, pneumonia, arthritis and meningitis, etc.

**How soon do symptoms appear?**

The incubation period is variable and unclear.

**How is a staph infection spread?**

Staph lives on the skin. Staph can rub off the skin of an infected person onto the skin of another person during (skin to skin) contact between them. Staph infections are most often spread through contaminated hands. It is unknown the exact role clothing and environmental surfaces play in the spread of staph but a good rule of thumb is to not share personal hygiene objects (i.e. towels, soap, clothes) that have come into contact with someone else's skin. Transmission may also occur by droplets from wounds or lesions.

**When and for how long is a person able to spread the disease?**

As long as the patient is carrying the bacteria or the site of infection is open and still has bacteria, the disease can be spread.

**How is a person diagnosed?**

Laboratory tests are available to obtain a positive diagnosis.

## What is the treatment?

In cases where the infection is a localized skin infection, topical antimicrobials are adequate unless the infection spreads significantly. For severe staph infections, penicillin is recommended. If the patient is hypersensitive to penicillin, cephalosporin or a macrolide may be used.

## Does past infection make a person immune?

No.

## Should children or others be excluded from child care, school, work or other activities if they have a staph infection?

No. However, infants, toddlers and school-aged children should be excluded if the staff determines the child is unwilling or unable to participate in activities. They also should be excluded if the staff determines that they cannot care for the child without compromising their ability to care for the health and safety of the other children in the group.

All others can attend work and other functions as long as they are well enough to do so. As always, good hand hygiene and respiratory etiquette are recommended.

However, all infected persons and care-takers of infected persons should be educated on proper precautions and follow good hygiene/hand washing principles.

## What can be done to prevent the spread of staph infections?

- Cover your wounds. Keep wounds covered with clean, dry bandages until healed. Follow your doctor's instructions about proper care of the wound. Pus from infected wounds can contain staph so keeping the infection covered will help prevent the spread to others. Bandages and tape can be thrown away with the regular trash.
- Clean your hands often. You, your family, and others in close contact should wash their hands often with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand rub, especially after changing the bandage or touching the infected wound.
- Do not share personal items. Personal items include towels, washcloths, razors, clothing, and uniforms.
- Wash used sheets, towels, and clothes with water and laundry detergent. Use a dryer to dry them completely.
- Wash clothes according to manufacturer's instructions on the label.

## Additional Information:

Is available by calling the North Dakota Department of Health at 800.472.2180.

### Resources:

1. *Red Book: 2015 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*. 30<sup>th</sup> ed. [Children in Out-Of-Home Care]. Kimberlin, DW; Brady, MT; Jackson, MA; Long, SS. American Academy of Pediatrics. 2015: 132-151.
2. *Red Book: 2015 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*. 30<sup>th</sup> ed. [Staphylococcal Infections]. Kimberlin, DW; Brady, MT; Jackson, MA; Long, SS. American Academy of Pediatrics. 2015: 715-732.
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2011) Healthcare-associated Infections (HAIs). [www.cdc.gov/HAI/organisms/staph.html](http://www.cdc.gov/HAI/organisms/staph.html)