

Fact Sheet: Staph Skin Infections

(includes methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* or “MRSA” and community-associated MRSA or “CA-MRSA”)

Overview

Staph is a germ normally found on the skin or inside the nose of many people. Most people with staph on their skin or in their nose have no symptoms.

Because staph can easily enter a cut or scrape, it is a common cause of skin infections. Sometimes, the germs get into the blood and cause serious illness or severe pneumonia during influenza (“flu”) season.

“MRSA” is a kind of staph that is resistant to some antibiotics. This kind of staph is common in hospitals.

“CA-MRSA” is a resistant kind of staph that causes infections outside hospitals.

What are the symptoms?

Skin infections caused by staph are usually red and painful. Some start as a painful bump that seems like a spider bite, but quickly become an abscess (boil) filled with pus and germs.

How does staph spread?

Touching skin-to-skin can spread staph from one person to another.

Staph can be picked up from surfaces that are often touched, like phones or doorknobs. Sometimes shared personal items, like towels, soap, or sports equipment can spread staph.

Pus from an abscess is especially contagious on skin or surfaces.

How can I avoid staph infections?

- **Wash your hands** regularly with soap and water or hand sanitizer.
- Use your own towels, soap, and other personal items; do not share these.
- Clean shared athletic equipment before use.

If I get a staph infection, how can I keep it from spreading to others?

- Keep a clean dry dressing over the infected area, especially if there is pus.
- Pay extra attention to cleanliness and wash your hands frequently.
- Do not share linens, towels or other personal items with others.
- When possible, use hot water and a hot dryer for your laundry.
- Avoid contact sports until your infection is healed.



For more information

Talk to your healthcare provider or visit:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_mrsa_ca_public.htm

Georgia DHR Division of Public Health

health.state.ga.us/mrsa

Georgia United against Antibiotic Resistant Disease (GUARD) Coalition

www.guard-ga.org



Discharge Instructions Skin Abscess

What is a skin abscess?

A skin abscess is an infection with pus under the skin, sometimes called a “boil”. A common cause is the germ “staph” (see other side).

It is caused when bacteria (germs) get under the skin and cause an infection. The pus forms as the body fights the infection.

How can the abscess be cured?

The pus must drain for the infection to heal. You may use warm compresses to “ripen” the abscess, but DO NOT try to pop or puncture the abscess yourself. If your abscess is not draining on its own, your doctor may help the pus to drain through a small incision. Sometimes cotton gauze is also packed inside the abscess cavity to draw out the pus.

Important advice for patients:

- Avoid touching the abscess with bare hands.
- Keep the abscess covered with a clean, dry dressing. If the dressing becomes wet with pus, it should be carefully changed and thrown away in a plastic bag. Pus is very contagious.
- **Wash your hands** frequently with soap and water or hand sanitizer.
- Avoid contact-sports and gym class until the wound is completely healed.
- Avoid close skin-to-skin contact with other people to keep the infection from spreading.

Special Instructions!

- **Some patients need antibiotics.**

_____ If prescribed, take all antibiotics as directed until gone.

- **Some patients need dressing changes.**

_____ Carefully remove and discard packing / dressing in a plastic bag, every _____ days.

Replace with new packing and a clean dry dressing as directed.

Supplies needed:

_____ Gloves
_____ Sterile gauze dressings (size _____)
_____ Adhesive dressing tape
_____ Sterile cotton gauze strips for packing
_____ Other (*specify*) _____

- **Some patients need follow-up.**

_____ Return to _____ in _____ days for a recheck and new dressing.

What to watch for:

If any of these symptoms appear, return to your healthcare provider or emergency department immediately:

- Increasing redness and pain, spreading further from the wound edges
- New fever, or fever that lasts more than one day
- Severe headache, weakness, or pain, new cough or trouble breathing.