

What is *Staphylococcus aureus* (Staph)?

Staphylococcus aureus is a bacteria that can cause skin infections and other more severe infections such as pneumonia and bloodstream infections. Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) is a form of the *Staphylococcus* bacteria that has become resistant to commonly used antibiotics, such as methicillin which is related to penicillin. There are other antibiotics that can treat MRSA infections, if necessary.

What does a skin infection look like?

Symptoms of a skin infection can include swelling, redness, tenderness and pus. Skin infections sometimes look like “spider bites”, pimples or boils.

**How serious are skin infections?**

Skin infections that only involve the skin are usually mild and easily treated. Although it is rare, sometimes the bacteria can cause severe illnesses such as bloodstream infections which may be fatal. Therefore, it is very important to see your healthcare provider if you have a skin infection that is not improving.

How are Staph germs spread?

Any drainage from a skin wound should be considered infectious. Staph is primarily spread through contact with the bacteria, either by direct person-to-person contact or indirectly through shared equipment, personal items or contaminated surfaces. Examples of shared objects include towels, soap, razors, clothing and athletic equipment. ***Frequent hand washing is the best way to prevent the spread of Staph germs.***

How are Staph infections treated?

Most uncomplicated skin infections can be treated by a healthcare provider without the use of antibiotics. A quick office procedure called “Incision and Drainage” may be performed to drain the pus. It is important to keep the area clean and covered until it is healed. In certain circumstances the healthcare provider may prescribe an antibiotic, but they usually are not needed.

What are your responsibilities as a teacher, school nurse or school official?

- Instruct students to report all suspected skin infections to the teacher or school nurse.
- Completely cover all wounds with a bandage sufficient to contain the drainage. If wounds cannot be covered completely, students with skin infections should be excluded from school until the lesions can be covered adequately or are healed.
- Bandages that become wet, loose or saturated with drainage should be removed immediately and replaced with fresh bandage. Always discard used bandages immediately into appropriate trash receptacles, and wash hands after touching or treating a skin infection.
- Report clusters or outbreaks of illness (more than three cases in a school, classroom or sports team) to your local health department. Individuals with skin infections do NOT need to be reported.
- Teach and support frequent hand hygiene practices.
- Wipe down shared desks, keyboards, phones, and light switches regularly with an EPA-approved disinfectant.
- A diluted bleach solution may be used, but MUST be mixed daily to be effective. Use 1 tablespoon household bleach in 1 quart of cool water, or 1/4 cup bleach in one gallon of cool water.

**What should students do to prevent the spread of Staph germs?**

- Wash your hands often with warm, soapy water.
- Use 60-95% alcohol-based hand gel to disinfect hands that are not visibly soiled.
- Report skin infections to the teacher or school nurse.
- Avoid contact with other people’s skin infections.
- Cover all wounds with a clean, dry bandage, and replace immediately if the bandage becomes wet, loose or saturated.
- Stay home from school if wound drainage cannot be contained by a bandage.
- Shower immediately after physical education class or sports activities.
- Do not share personal hygiene items (bar soap, towels, razors) or clothing.

Revised 12/08

