

Staph Infection (Staphylococcus Aureus)

Staph is a bacteria (called Staphylococcus) that about 30% of people carry in their noses. Staph infection outcomes vary from minor infections of the skin, such as pimples or boils, to serious infections of the bloodstream.

Transmission

Staph enters the skin weakened by an injury and develops into an infection. Staph is spread via:

- **Person to person.** Direct skin-to-skin contact with an infected person
 - Staph infections are most often spread through contaminated hands
 - Droplets from lesions or nose may occur but are not common
- **Environment to person.** Spread by contact with objects such as personal items

Anyone can become infected by a staph bacteria, however, those at higher risk for severe infections include people with:

- **Chronic conditions**, such as diabetes
- **Liver disease**
- **A recent medical procedure**
- **Foreign parts**, such as catheters, pacemakers or even grafts
- **Decreased immune systems**, such as those with HIV/AIDS or cancers

Past infections do not make a person immune. The disease can still spread as long as the individual is carrying bacteria, or the site of infection is open and still has bacteria.

Symptoms

Symptoms vary depending upon the site of infection (skin, heart, lungs or joints) and may include:

- **Skin lesions**
- **Fever**
- **Extreme tiredness**
- **Pneumonia**
- **Arthritis**
- **Meningitis**

The incubation period is variable and unclear.

Diagnosis

Laboratory tests are available to obtain a positive diagnosis.

Treatment

Minor skin infections:

- Topical antimicrobials are adequate unless the infection spreads significantly.

Severe staph infections:

- Penicillin is recommended.

Prevention

- **Cover your wounds.** Keep wounds covered with clean, dry bandages until healed. Pus from infected wounds can contain staph so keeping the infection covered will help prevent the spread to others. Follow your doctor's instructions about proper care of the wound.
- **Clean your hands often.** Use 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.** This includes towels, washcloths, razors, and clothing.
- **Wash used sheets, towels, and clothes.** Use a dryer to dry them completely.

Exclusion Guidance

Individuals with staph infections should not be excluded from work, school or child care unless the [general exclusions apply](#).

For additional information about staph infections, contact the North Dakota Health and Human Services' Public Health Division at 800.427.2180.

Resources:

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2019, March 22). *Vital Signs – Staff Infections Can Kill*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved May 16, 2023, from https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/scabies/gen_info/faqs.html
2. Kimberlin, D. W., Barnett, E. D., Lynfield, R., Sawyer, M. H. (2021) Red Book: 2021-2024 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases. 32nd ed. American Academy of Pediatrics. [Management and Prevention of infectious Diseases; Staphylococcus aureus][pages 122-133; 678-692].