

Staph infection (*Staphylococcus aureus*)

The germ commonly known as staph (*Staphylococcus aureus*) is often found on the skin and in the nose and throat of healthy people. It generally causes no problems or disease, but sometimes it can cause infections. If the staph germs enter the body through damaged skin, they can cause skin infections such as impetigo (school sores), boils and abscesses. Sometimes they get into the blood and cause blood poisoning (septicaemia).

Staph can also cause food poisoning and lung infection (pneumonia).

Staph is sometimes mentioned in the media when it causes outbreaks of infections in hospitals or in the community. Outbreaks can sometimes be caused by a type of staph known as MRSA, which stands for methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*. MRSA is not more infectious, but it can be more difficult to treat because it is resistant to some common antibiotics.

How it spreads

Staph skin infections spread from person to person by:

- directly touching infected areas of the skin, or by people touching their sores and then touching other people without washing their hands
- touching a surface contaminated with the germs – for example, clothing, tissues or toys.

People usually get staph food poisoning if infected people who have not washed their hands well touch food that other people eat.

Exclusion period

Exclude until the person has taken antibiotics for at least 24 hours and feels well.

Actions for educators and other staff

Follow the exclusion period in the *Staying healthy* guidelines.

Where possible, ensure that sores are covered with a waterproof dressing. Put all dressings in a lidded bin as soon as they are removed.

Ensure staff and children have good hand hygiene.

Ensure staff use appropriate cleaning practices, as described in the *Staying healthy* guidelines.

Actions for parents and carers

If a doctor has prescribed antibiotics, make sure your child takes the full course.

Keep your child at home until they have been on antibiotics for 24 hours and are well.

If your child has sores, cover them with a waterproof dressing (like a plastic adhesive strip) where possible. Keep your child at home until sores have dried completely.

Make sure your child washes their hands thoroughly and often, especially if they touch their sores.

More information about staph infection

See healthdirect for more information on prevention, diagnosis and treatment of staph infection (healthdirect.gov.au/staph-infections).

To find out if a child needs medical help:

- use the online symptom checker (healthdirect.gov.au/symptom-checker)
- speak to a registered nurse by calling the 24-hour health advice hotline on 1800 022 222.