



Skin Infections

Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA)

Surprising fact: The best way to prevent skin infections is simple—**wash your hands**. Washing your hands often with soap and warm water also helps prevent colds and flu. Antibacterial soaps are not needed.

What to do:

Wash cuts, scrapes and sores with soap and water, then keep them clean and dry. Cover them with bandages until they are healed.

Avoid contact with other people's cuts or sores and any materials that have come in contact with them.

Avoid sharing personal items such as soap, towels and razors.

Clean and wash sports clothing and equipment after each use.

Call your doctor if:

You have signs of infection, such as pain, redness, swelling and heat, and oozing pus or blood.

New symptoms develop during or after you get treated.

Skin infections start when bacteria get into a cut or scrape. Bacteria live on everyone's skin and usually cause no harm. But when staphylococcus bacteria get into your body through a break in the skin, they can cause a "staph" infection. Staph infections may spread to other people by skin-to-skin contact and from shared items such as bedding, towels, soap, clothes and sports equipment.

Staph infections are becoming harder to treat.

Penicillin and some other antibiotics used to kill bacteria may no longer work against staph germs. These staph germs are "resistant" to the antibiotics. They are called MRSA (methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus), and they are resistant to all penicillin-type antibiotics. Skin infections from MRSA can develop into more serious, even life-threatening, problems such as infections of the heart, blood, and bones.

MRSA infections happen most often in nursing homes and hospitals, where people are recovering from surgery. But more and more cases are showing up among people of all ages in the community. These "community cases" of MRSA can often be treated effectively with other kinds of antibiotics.

Some common skin infections caused by staph are:

- **Boils**—tender, red lumps that swell and get white heads like very big pimples. Boils form on oily or moist skin such as the neck, armpits, groin and buttock. They may break open and ooze pus or blood.
- **Impetigo**—blisters with fluid in them, which pop and get a yellow crust. Children often get it on the face. It can be spread by scratching.
- **Infected hair roots (follicles)**—small bumps under the skin at the base of the hair. They may itch.

Skin infections should be brought to the attention of your health care provider so they don't spread or cause more serious problems.

Only take antibiotics when they are prescribed by your health care provider. Taking them when they are not needed could create stronger germs, like MRSA. And if you get a prescription, always finish the whole bottle—the last few pills kill the toughest germs.

treated.