

Abscess and Wound Care (Skin Infections and MRSA)

What causes a skin infection or abscess?

Skin infections can start when germs called bacteria touch an area of the skin or get into a cut, scrape or wound. Some infections get tender, swollen, and fill with pus. This is called an abscess. The most common bacteria on the skin are called Staph aureus. This bacteria is also common in the mouth and nose. It can cause pneumonia and other infections in the body.

How are they treated?

- Some skin infections need to be treated with antibiotics. Antibiotics are drugs used to treat infections caused by bacteria.
- If an abscess does not drain on its own it may need to be drained.
- Some skin infections need both antibiotics and draining.

Will treatment prevent future infections?

Sometimes common antibiotics don't kill bacteria. This is called **antibiotic resistance**. Some skin infections cannot be treated with an antibiotic called Methicillin or other similar antibiotics. You may have heard about MRSA. It is short for Methicillin Resistant Staph Aureus.

What is a MRSA infection vs. colonization and how do people get it?

An **infection** means that germs that are in or on the body making the person sick. There may be fever, pus from a wound or a high white blood cell count. Some people will have the germs on their skin, in their nose or even their urine but are not sick. This is called **colonization**.

People can get MRSA anywhere from:

- Direct contact with a person with a wound infection, respiratory infection, or who is colonized with the bacteria.
- Contact with a contaminated object or surface.

What can be done to stop the spread of infection?

- **Hand washing is the best way to stop the spread of infections. Teach your child and family to wash their hands:**
 - If they sneeze, blow, or touch their nose or yours.
 - Before and after close contact with others.
 - After using the toilet or changing diapers
 - When they come home from daycare, school or other activities.
- **How to wash your hands:**
 - 1) Wet your hands and wrists with warm water.
 - 2) Add liquid soap or use a bar of soap.
 - 3) Lather soap for at least 15 seconds. Wash between fingers, up to wrists and under finger nails. Rinse with warm water.
 - 4) Dry hands well. Use a clean towel or paper towel.



- An alcohol based hand sanitizer can be used along with hand washing if needed. Use enough sanitizer in your hand to cover your whole hand and rub them until dry.
- **Contact precautions are used in the hospital to stop the spread of MRSA infection.**
 - **Everyone must clean their hands when going into and leaving the room.**
 - If your child has MRSA, they must stay in a private room. They can only leave the room for procedures. This is to prevent spreading germs to other sick people in the hospital. You and your child must not visit with other patients in the hospital.
 - Hospital staff entering the room will wear a gown and gloves.

How long does MRSA last?

- This depends on how bad the infection is, how antibiotics work and your child's health.
- After the infection is treated, your child may still be colonized with MRSA. This means they may develop future infection. Over time, normal skin germs may take the place of MRSA.
- Only patients with a MRSA infection should be treated. Most often, MRSA colonization is not treated as it does not usually work.
- **Your child's primary doctor will get a report about your child's MRSA infection. You will need to work with the doctor to have more culture's done. Hospital contact precautions will continue during future hospital stays until culture results show the infection is gone.**

What care is needed once we go home?

- **Good hand washing is very important. It is the best way to stop the spread of infection.**
- MRSA is not a risk to people unless they are ill and less able to fight infection.
- Your child may go to school and out in the community. There are no special precautions with family, friends and school or daycare unless the wound is still open and draining.
- Let the staff know your child has MRSA when going to a clinic visit, therapy or to the hospital. They can take steps to keep it from spreading to others.
- Share information about your child's condition with the daycare.



If your child has an open wound, special care is needed until the wound is healed.

- Be sure your child does not have direct contact with others until the wound stops draining.
- Wash your hands often. Always wash right before and after changing a bandage or wound dressing. This keeps germs from spreading to other places on the body.
- Keep the wound covered. Change the dressing at least once a day or when you see drainage. Use a glove on your hand rather than any tweezers or equipment to change dressings. If you must use them, do not share them. Throw them away at the end of treatment. Throw away all disposable things that have touched the wound or drainage in a separate trash bag. Tie the bag before placing it in the garbage.
- Change towels and linens daily if possible. Keep your child's laundry separate from others. Collect it in a plastic bag or separate hamper so it does not touch your clothes as you gather it up. Wash clothes and linens that come in contact with the wound with your normal detergent in hot water. Dry clothes well using the hottest setting.

- All non-clothing items that touch the wound need to be cleaned. Use a freshly mixed disinfecting solution. Mix 1 tablespoon of bleach with one quart of water. A phenol-containing product such as Lysol® or Pine-sol® can also be used.
- Wash all dishes as usual with hot soapy water or put them in the dishwasher.

Will antibiotics be needed at home?

- If your child's abscess was drained and it is small (less than 5 cm), your child may not need antibiotics by mouth at home.
- If your child is treated with an antibiotic, all of the medicine needs to be taken, even if the infection is gone and the wound is healed
- If an ointment is ordered, be sure to follow the directions for using it.
- If your child's infection does not get better or gets worse, a health care provider should check the wound. A culture test should be done to see what bacteria are causing the problem. Call your child's health care provider if your child is not getting better with treatment.

When should my child be seen for a follow-up visit?

Your child may require follow up with the General Surgery clinic staff or your Primary Care Provider. This will depend on the size, location, and severity of the abscess. Please see your After Visit Summary for specific follow up instructions.

What do I need to do if my child is getting repeated MRSA infections?

Your child's health care provider will talk with you about doing this special cleaning.

- Use Mupirocin ointment in both nostrils twice a day for 5 days. Use a clean applicator or Q-Tip™ each time.
- Wash your child's entire body with Chlorohexidine (CHG) for 5 days in a row. Follow the directions on the CHG information sheet.
- Wash and rinse all sheets and towels in **hot** water. Use towels and washcloths once and do not share them. Plastic mattress covers are helpful. Wipe and dry mattress covers every time you change the sheets.
- Do not share any personal care items with your child that has MRSA. This includes brushes.

Where can I get more information about MRSA?

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Website <http://www.cdc.gov>.
- For information specific to your child or any further cultures, call your child's doctor or clinic staff.

ALERT: Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any questions or concerns or if your child has special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

This teaching sheet is meant to help you care for your child. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up