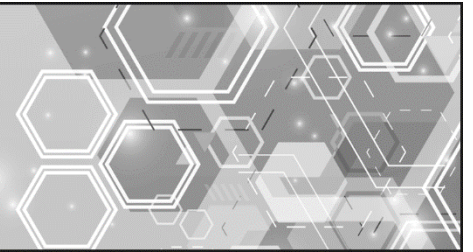




Durham Region Health Department **Facts about...**



Staphylococcus

What is it?

Staphylococcus is an infection most commonly caused by the bacteria *Staphylococcus aureus*, which can affect skin, blood, lungs, heart, intestines, urinary tract, and joints. Illness with Staphylococcus can range from mild to severe. It is a common cause of skin and soft tissue infections.

How is it spread?

Staphylococcus can be spread in many different ways. It is most often spread to others by contaminated hands from someone with an infection. The skin and mucous membranes are usually an effective barrier against infection. If these barriers are breached (e.g., small skin breaks) *Staphylococcus aureus* may gain access to underlying tissues or the bloodstream and cause infection. As well, staphylococcal food poisoning results from eating food contaminated with toxins produced by certain types of Staphylococcus, resulting in diarrhea and vomiting. Persons who are immunocompromised or who have invasive medical devices are particularly vulnerable to infection.

What do I look for?

Most infections caused by *Staphylococcus aureus* are skin and soft tissue infections such as abscesses or cellulitis. Symptoms are dependent on the type of Staphylococcus infection. With skin infections there can be redness, swelling and pain (e.g., cellulitis) or pockets of infection and pus (e.g., abscess). With serious infections such as pneumonia (infection of the lungs) or bacteremia (bloodstream infection) symptoms may include difficulty breathing, fever, or chills. Staphylococcal food poisoning may cause diarrhea and vomiting.

How is it treated?

Many common skin infections caused by *Staphylococcus aureus* will heal without medical treatment. However, some skin infections may require antibiotics and others may need incision and drainage of the infected site. Some serious *Staphylococcus aureus* infections (such as pneumonia or bloodstream infections) typically require hospitalization and treatment with intravenous antibiotics.

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How can I protect myself?

- Wash your hands frequently and properly to prevent the spread of Staphylococcus. Use warm running water and soap, rubbing together for at least 15 seconds, or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Avoid sharing personal hygiene items, such as towels, bandages, razors, and anything else that may have contacted body fluid.
- Depending on the severity of your infection, your health care provider may ask you to avoid activities that put others at risk, particularly if you work closely with others.
- Refrain from swimming and food preparation if you have a current infection.
- If you have a cut or a wound on your body, keep it clean and covered.

More information can be obtained from

Durham Health Connection Line 905-668-2020 or 1-800-841-2729

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905-668-2020 or 1-800-841-2729 | durham.ca/health

If you require this information in an accessible format, contact 1-800-841-2729.

