

Overview of Staphylococcus skin infections

Tirohanga whānui ki ngā pokenga kiri Staphylococcus

Staphylococcus aureus (also called Staph aureus or Staph) is a type of bacteria (germ) that commonly lives on healthy skin. Some people carry Staph in moist areas on their body such as their nostrils, armpits and groin.

Staph is usually harmless and not noticeable. But if the skin is very dry, scratched or grazed, the bacteria can multiply and cause skin infections.

The infected skin is generally red, swollen and painful. Sometimes there can be pus and an unpleasant smell. Types of infections include boils, abscesses, impetigo (school sores), cellulitis and folliculitis.



Self-care with Staphylococcus skin infections

- Keep the sore or infected area covered with a dressing or plaster until it has healed up.
- Do not scratch the area and avoid touching it. Wash your hands well after touching the infected area.
- Do not let anyone else touch the infected area.
- Clean the infected area with water every day and cover it again with a clean dressing or plaster.

Getting help with Staphylococcus skin infections

See your general practice team if the infected area or sore:

- is larger than the size of a 10-cent coin (approximately 1.5 cm)
- is getting bigger
- has pus
- has red streaks coming from it
- is not getting any better after 2 days
- is near one of your eyes.

You may be prescribed antibiotics. But some Staph bacteria are resistant to many commonly used antibiotics.

If you have repeated staph skin infections, you may need to try to remove the staph from your skin. This is called decolonisation.



Preventing Staphylococcus skin infections

To reduce the risk of spreading a Staph skin infection, practise good hand hygiene. This is especially important before and after touching or cleaning an infected area, after going to the toilet and before handling and eating food.

Written by HealthInfo clinical advisers. Last reviewed May 2025.