

# Wellness Topic

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## Staph Infections

Staph infections are caused by staphylococcus bacteria, a type of germ commonly found on the skin or even in the nose of healthy individuals. Most of the time, these bacteria cause no problems or result in relatively minor skin infections.

However staph infections can turn deadly if the bacteria invade deeper into your body, entering your bloodstream, joints, bones, lungs or heart.

### Skin Infections

Skin infections caused by staph bacteria include:

- **Boils.** The most common type of staph infection is the boil, a pocket of pus that develops in a hair follicle or oil gland. The skin over the infected area usually becomes red and swollen. If a boil breaks open, it may drain pus, blood or an amber-colored liquid. Boils occur most often under the arms or around the groin or buttocks.
- **Impetigo.** This contagious, often painful rash can occur in all ages, but it's most common in young children and infants. The types of impetigo caused by staph bacteria usually feature large blisters that may ooze fluid and develop a honey-colored crust. These sores occur most commonly around the nose and mouth.
- **Cellulitis.** Cellulitis — an infection of the deeper layers of skin — causes skin redness and swelling on the surface of your skin. Sores (ulcers) or areas of oozing discharge may develop too. Cellulitis occurs most often in the lower legs and feet of older persons.
- **Staphylococcal scalded skin syndrome.** Toxins produced as a result of a staph infection may lead to staphylococcal scalded skin syndrome. Affecting mostly newborns, this condition features fever, a rash and sometimes blisters. When the blisters break, the top layer of skin comes off leaving a red, raw surface that looks like a burn.

### Prevention

These common-sense precautions can help lower your risk of developing staph infections:

- **Wash your hands.** Careful hand-washing is your best defense against germs. Wash your hands briskly for at least 15 to 30 seconds, then dry them with a disposable towel and use another towel to turn off the faucet. If your hands aren't visibly dirty, you can use a hand sanitizer containing at least 62 percent alcohol.
- **Keep wounds covered.** Keep cuts and abrasions clean and covered with sterile, dry bandages until they heal. The pus from infected sores often contains staph bacteria, and keeping wounds covered will help keep the bacteria from spreading.