

SKIN INFECTIONS



Bacterial Skin Infections

Bacteria are everywhere, including on your skin. Usually, they do not cause any problems. However, if you have a cut, scrape, or wound that becomes red, sore and will not heal, you may have a bacterial infection.^{1,2,3}

What is a bacterial skin infection?

Bacteria are microscopic organisms that live, thrive, and colonise on and inside your body. In fact, the body contains far more bacterial cells than human ones.¹

Most bacteria are harmless, vital even, playing an important role in digestion and fighting infection.¹ For example, beneficial gut bacteria help with digestion and immunity, making your body more resistant to disease, deriving as much benefit from you in return.¹

How your skin becomes infected?

Staph (short for '*Staphylococcus aureus*') bacteria are the most common cause of skin infections. A variety of factors, including your immune status and the types of contact sport you play, can increase your risk of developing staph infections.¹⁰

Types, signs and symptoms

Signs and symptoms of bacterial skin infections vary widely, depending on the location and severity of the infection.¹⁰



Impetigo

- Mainly affects infants and children.⁴
- Frequently occurs around the nose and mouth but also the hands and feet.⁴
- Classic signs include red sores that ooze and rupture and then form a yellowish-brown crust.⁴
- Contagious, it can spread to other parts of the body and to other children through contact with the infected area.⁴

Furuncle (boil)

- Commonly found on the face, neck, armpits, buttocks and thighs but can appear anywhere on the body.⁵
- Symptoms include a swollen, red lump in the skin (sometimes, a hair will grow in it), painful to touch and filled with liquid or pus that may ooze out of a central 'head'.⁵
- The boil itself is not contagious but the pus inside it is, particularly if it is oozing.⁵



Folliculitis

- Occurs anywhere on the skin where there is hair.^{6,7}
- Commonly found on the neck, breasts, buttocks, back and chest.^{6,7}
- Hair follicle(s) become inflamed and infected and manifests as a tender pustule.^{6,7}
- If caused by staph (short for '*Staphylococcus aureus*') it can be spread from person to person. Do not share personal items such as pillow cases or towels.¹⁰

Infected wounds

- Any wound contaminated with dirt or bacteria can get infected, especially deeper scrapes which tend to grind dirt into the skin, and puncture wounds.⁸
- Wound pain that worsens a day or more after the injury often indicates the first sign of infection, and the wound may become red and swollen, ooze pus, and a fever may develop.⁸ While the wound itself is not contagious, to reduce the spread of bacteria to others, keep any cuts clean and covered.⁸

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How is a bacterial skin infection diagnosed?

To diagnose a bacterial skin infection, your doctor will perform a physical exam and closely examine any skin lesions you may have.⁹

A sample for testing may be necessary to check for signs of bacteria.⁹

How is it treated?

Treatment usually involves antibiotics and drainage of the infected area.¹⁰ Topical antibiotics can play an important role in the prevention and treatment of many bacterial skin infections.³

Topical antibiotic creams and ointments, such as fusidic acid or mupirocin can be prescribed or recommended over-the-counter for bacterial skin infections such as impetigo, infected cuts and grazes, and infected dermatitis. Topical antibiotics work by stopping the growth of the bacteria causing the infection. These topical creams can also be used to prevent wound infections from occurring. Sodium fusidate (available as an ointment) is a salt of fusidic acid and it works in the same way.^{3,11} Your doctor or pharmacist will be able to recommend the appropriate product to treat your infection.

In most cases, a bacterial skin infection does not cause serious harm. However, if left untreated, and the infection continues to penetrate even deeper it could enter the bloodstream, joints, bones, lungs or heart, and become dangerous.¹⁰

Reducing your risk of getting or spreading a bacterial skin infection

Keeping skin clean can help lower your risk of developing skin infections. Precautions to lower your risk of developing bacterial skin infections include; washing hands thoroughly, keeping wounds covered, not sharing personal items and taking care when handling food.⁴

Please note: This is an informational leaflet only and should not be used for diagnosis. For more information on Skin Infections, consult your healthcare professional.

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