Staphylococcus aureus (Staph infection)

This sheet is about exposure to *Staphylococcus aureus* and having a staph infection in pregnancy or while breastfeeding. This information is based on published research studies. It should not take the place of medical care and advice from your healthcare providers.

What is Staphylococcus aureus? What is a staph infection?

Staphylococcus aureus (staph) is a type of bacteria (germ). Staph bacteria are commonly found on the skin or in the nose. Staph can also be found in the female genital tract.

A staph infection can happen when the staph bacteria grow out of control, or when staph bacteria enter the body through a cut or sore on the skin. Staph infections can cause boils or blisters on the skin. They can also cause infections in the lungs (pneumonia), bloodstream (sepsis), bone (osteomyelitis), or in a wound, or inflammation of the heart (endocarditis).

Methicillin-resistant S. aureus, commonly known as MRSA, is a type of Staphylococcus aureus that can be difficult to treat because it is resistant to antibiotics (the infection does not respond to antibiotic treatment).

Some people are more likely to get a staph infection. This includes people who are sick in hospitals, people who just had surgery or other medical procedures, people living in crowded places like shelters or prisons, children in daycare, people who use intravenous (IV) drugs, people with weak immune systems, people with chronic health conditions (like diabetes or cancer), athletes, and military personnel.

Can I get food poisoning if I eat food that is contaminated with staph?

People who carry staph can contaminate food if they don't wash their hands before touching it. Staph bacteria make toxins that can cause gastrointestinal (GI) illness if contaminated food is eaten. Although staph bacteria on food can be killed by cooking, the toxins that they make can survive the heat and can still cause illness. Staph food poisoning can start 30 minutes to 8 hours after eating contaminated food. Symptoms include nausea, vomiting, stomach pain, and diarrhea. Staph food poisoning is usually not serious and generally does not last for more than a day. The best way to avoid contaminating food with staph is to practice good food handling practices, including handwashing.

Can I get a staph infection through my job?

Some workers are more likely to be exposed to staph than others, including healthcare professionals, veterinarians, rescue personnel, and workers who prepare food. To lower the chance of a staph infection, it is important to wash hands and follow all safety protocols for the job, including the use of protective equipment when needed.

I am pregnant. If I am in close contact with someone with a confirmed staph skin infection, how can I lower my chances of getting the infection?

- Do not touch the person's sores, cuts, or bandages.
- Wash your hands with soap and water often and always wash your hands after direct contact with anyone who has any skin infection.
- Do not share towels, soap, razors, tweezers, or other personal items.
- If you need to wash the laundry of a person with a staph infection, wear gloves while handling the dirty laundry, wash laundry using the warmest water temperature recommended by the manufacturer's directions and dry the laundry thoroughly.

I have a staph infection. Can it make it harder for me to become pregnant?
It is not known if having a staph infection can make it harder to get pregnant.

Does having a staph infection increase the chance of miscarriage?
Miscarriage is common and can occur in any pregnancy for many different reasons. It is not known if having a staph infection increases the chance of miscarriage.

Does having a staph infection increase the chance of birth defects?
Birth defects can happen in any pregnancy for different reasons. Out of all babies born each year, about 3 out of 100 (3%) will have a birth defect. We look at research studies to try to understand if an exposure, like a staph infection, might increase the chance of birth defects in a pregnancy.

Staph infections have not been linked to a higher chance of birth defects. However, some staph infections can cause a fever. A high fever in the first trimester can increase the chance of certain birth defects. For more information about fever, see the MotherToBaby fact sheet at https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/hyperthermia-pregnancy/.

Would having a staph infection cause other pregnancy complications?
If the amniotic fluid (fluid that surrounds the fetus) becomes infected with staph, it could cause preterm delivery (birth before week 37), and pregnancy loss. Staph can also be passed to a baby at the time of delivery. Most of the time this does not cause problems for the baby, but sometimes it causes skin infection or other illnesses in the newborn.

Does having a staph infection in pregnancy cause long-term problems for the child?
Studies have not been done to see if having a staph infection during pregnancy can cause learning or behavior issues for the child.

Breastfeeding while I have a staph infection:
Staph infections are a common cause of mastitis (infection in the breast). The American Academy of Pediatrics states that women who have mastitis can continue to breastfeed their child.

A staph skin infection could spread to a child from direct skin contact or through contact with clothing, bedding or other materials that have the bacteria on them. If you have a staph skin infection, it is important to keep the wound covered with bandages, so the baby does not touch the wound or any discharge coming from it, and to keep blankets and other items clean. This is important during breastfeeding and even if you are not currently breastfeeding.

There are reports of infants getting staph infections through expressed (pumped) breast milk that was contaminated through improper cleaning of pumping equipment or storage containers. It is important to thoroughly wash and sterilize pumping equipment and storage containers, as well as your hands, when pumping breast milk.

Not all staph infections require treatment. However, if you are being treated with a medication, you can contact MotherToBaby to discuss the use of your specific medication(s) during breastfeeding. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about all your breastfeeding questions.

If a man has a staph infection, could it affect his fertility or increase the chance of birth defects?
Some studies have suggested that a staph infection of the genital tract in men might affect the number, movement, and shape of the sperm and decrease fertility (ability to make healthy sperm). In general, exposures that men have are unlikely to increase risks to a pregnancy. For more information, please see the MotherToBaby fact sheet Paternal Exposures at https://mothertobaby.org/fact-sheets/paternal-exposures-pregnancy/.

Please click here for references.

Questions? Call 866.626.6847 | Text 855.999.3525 | Email or Chat at MotherToBaby.org.

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