

# Staphylococcus aureus (Staph infection)

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

## **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. A staph infection can happen when staph bacteria grow out of control or 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), or in a wound. 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).

People who have a higher chance of getting a staph infection include those who are sick in hospitals, people recovering from surgery or other medical procedures, people living in over-crowded conditions (such as shelters or prisons), children in daycare, intravenous (IV) drug users, people with weakened 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?**

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 they make can survive the heat and 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 foods. 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, use 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 a staph infection can make it harder to get pregnant.

## **Does having/getting 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 a staph infection increases the chance of miscarriage.

## **Does having/getting a staph infection increase the chance of birth defects?**

Every pregnancy starts with a 3-5% chance of having a birth defect. This is called the background risk. 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/getting 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). Staph can also be passed to a baby from an infected mother 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 illness in the newborn.

***Does having/getting 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 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 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 get a woman pregnant). 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](https://mothertobaby.org).

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