

# Abscess

**Call your child's regular doctor  
NOW (night or day) or go to the emergency  
department if your child:**

- Has a new fever.
- Has any signs of worsening infection such as muscle or joint aches, sweating, or a general sick feeling.

**Call your child's regular doctor if your child has:**

- A new abscess.
- More pain, redness or swelling around the infected area.
- Drainage or a bad smell from the infected area.
- Bad diarrhea.
- Or you have any questions regarding your child's care.

**See the doctor or PAWS 314.454.7297**

- For exam and re-evaluation if no improvement in 3 days.
- For exam and re-evaluation in 5 to 7 days.

**An abscess is an infection of the soft tissue of the skin.** It can occur anywhere on the body. An abscess usually looks like a pimple, boil, or spider bite. Most are caused by *Staphylococcus (staf-ih-loh-KOK-us) aureus (OR-e-us)*, also called "staph". This germ (bacteria) is usually found on the skin and in the nose.

**A common form of "staph" is called MRSA** or Methicillin (meth-uh-SILL-un) resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*. MRSA is a type of "staph" infection that cannot be killed by the usual medicines (antibiotics).

## Signs and Symptoms

- A spot on the skin that is usually red, warm, swollen, feels hard and is very tender to touch
- Maybe a creamy liquid (pus) draining from the center
- Maybe a fever

## Treatment

Abscesses often need to be "opened up" and drained to clean out the collection of pus as the main treatment. This is done by making a small incision into the middle and washing out the pus. Often a gauze packing is placed inside the cleaned out area and taken out at your follow-up visit or at home. A large bandage is usually placed over the area. Your child may also need special wound care and antibiotics if bacteria are causing an infection.

- Most abscesses do not require a hospital stay.
- Most abscesses do not require antibiotics.

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## Risks

If treated early, most abscesses heal over days to weeks and do not cause any serious problems.

Some risks are:

- It comes back at a later date. Some people get them over and over again.
- A large abscess can damage important structures such as nerves, joints or tendons.
- Very rarely, the infection can spread throughout the blood and cause very serious infections in other parts of the body.

## How to Take Care of Your Child At Home

- Give your child acetaminophen (Tylenol®) for pain, but remember that no medicine will take away the pain completely. If your child is over 6 months old then you may use ibuprofen (Motrin® or Advil®) instead. **Never** give your child aspirin.
- Keep the area clean. Change the bandage as directed by your healthcare provider.
- Encourage your child to keep the body part with the wound above the level of his or her heart for 1 to 2 days if possible. This will help lessen the pain and swelling.
- If the dressing or packing comes off of wound accidentally, cover it with gauze or a band-aid. If you are being treated at PAWS, call PAWS at 314-454-7297. If you are not currently being treated at PAWS, notify your child's regular doctor.
- It is very important that your child's wound be looked at again after your first visit, even if you think it looks good. You will be instructed on whom to see for follow-up care.

## Helpful Tips to Prevent the Spread of "Staph" Infections

A "staph" infection can be passed to another person by skin to skin contact. It can also be spread by touching an item that has been in contact with the infected area. It is important to keep a draining wound covered to avoid spreading the infection.

- Wash hands with liquid soap for 15 to 20 seconds.
- Cover all cuts or wounds with a bandage.
- Use towels and washcloths **once** and wash them in hot water. Wash all bedding in hot water.
- Do not share towels, bed linens, razors, brushes, clothing, personal items or sports equipment.
- Clean sports equipment after every use.
- Shower every day with liquid soap. Do not share bar soaps. Also shower after playing sports or working out.
- After using the bathtub, wash it out with diluted household bleach. Do not use hot tubs or whirlpools until the wound is healed.

**If your child has recurring abscesses**, your child's doctor may want your child to be seen in the Pediatric Infectious Disease MRSA Clinic at St. Louis Children's Hospital 314-454-6050.