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FACT SHEET for Patients: Antibiotic-resistant "Staph" Skin Infections

Recently, doctors in Los Angeles have been seeing an increasing number of patients with skin infections caused by *Staphylococcus aureus* ("Staph") bacteria that are resistant to many antibiotics (drugs that kill bacteria). The Los Angeles County Department of Health Services is working with doctors and other healthcare providers to better understand why this is happening and how to prevent antibiotic (drug) resistant Staph skin infections from spreading.

What is a Staph skin infection?
Staph is a bacteria commonly found on human skin. Sometimes it does not cause any problems; sometimes it causes minor infections, such as pimples or boils. Staph skin infections often begin with an injury to the skin. Staph enters the skin weakened by the injury and develops into an infection. Symptoms of a Staph infection include redness, warmth, swelling, tenderness of the skin, and boils or blisters.

How do Staph skin infections spread?
The cleanest person can get a Staph infection. Staph can rub off the skin of an infected person onto the skin of another person during prolonged (skin to skin) contact between them. Or, the Staph can come off of the infected skin of a person onto commonly shared object or surface, and get onto the skin of the person who uses it next. Examples of commonly shared objects include personal hygiene objects (i.e. towels, soap, clothes), benches in saunas or hot tubs, and athletic equipment -- in other words, anything that could have touched the skin of a Staph infected person can carry the bacteria to the skin of another person.

How can I prevent myself from getting infected?
Avoid prolonged skin to skin contact with anyone you suspect could have a Staph skin infection. Do not share personal items with other persons. Clean objects and surfaces that you share with other persons, such as athletic equipment, before you use it. Always wash your skin, clothes, and towels that might be carrying Staph.

What should I do if I think I have a Staph skin infection?
If you suspect that you might have a Staph skin infection, consult your doctor or healthcare provider as soon as possible. Early treatment can help prevent the infection from getting worse. Be sure to follow each direction from your doctor or healthcare provider closely, even when you start to feel better. Weak or incomplete treatments of Staph infections lead to stronger, antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

If my doctor or health care provider has told me that I have an antibiotic-resistant Staph skin infection, what can I do to keep others from getting infected?
You can prevent spreading an antibiotic-resistant Staph skin infection to those you live with or others by following these steps:

1. Keep the infected area covered with clean, dry bandages. Pus from infected wounds is *very* infectious.
2. Wash your hands frequently with soap and warm water, especially after changing your bandages or touching the infected skin.
3. Regularly clean your bathroom and personal items. Wash linens and clothes that become soiled with hot water and bleach, when possible. Drying clothes in a hot dryer, rather than air-drying, also helps kill bacteria in clothes.
4. Tell any healthcare providers who treat you that you have an antibiotic-resistant Staph skin infection.