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**Statewide News Release**

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**Watch Out for Staph**

*Some Strains of the Common Bacteria Can Lead to Dangerous Skin Infections*

**FRANKFORT, KY (Oct. 18, 2007)** – Kentuckians should be aware of dangerous skin infections and take simple precautions to prevent infection from bacteria like *Staphylococcal aureus*, or *staph*, particularly strains that are difficult to treat with antibiotics.

According to the Kentucky Department for Public Health, staph is commonly carried on the skin or nose of healthy people, but can lead to a skin infection in certain instances. Increasingly, staph infections are caused by strains of the bacteria that are resistant to antibiotics traditionally used to treat these types of infections.

“If someone suspects he or she has a staph infection, it’s important to get proper medical treatment, and make sure you take steps to prevent the spread of the infection,” said William Hacker, M.D., acting undersecretary for health and public health commissioner.

Often, Hacker said, patients and their physicians may assume that the lesion is a spider or bug bite. The involved site can be red, swollen, painful and draining. More serious infections, such as surgical wound infections, bloodstream infections and pneumonia, can also occur.

Here are some additional facts about staph and how to avoid infection:

- Staph infections are spread by close contact with infected people. Staph can also come off infected skin onto shared objects and surfaces and then transfer onto the skin of another person who uses the object or surface.
- When Staphylococci become resistant, specific antibiotics, like Methicillin, may not cure those infections. This strain of staph is called Methicillin-Resistant *S. Aureus* (MRSA).
- Other antibiotics can be used to treat MRSA, but treatment may be longer and/or more expensive.

Common skin conditions caused by MRSA include infected cuts, boils, fluid-filled blisters (impetigo), or skin sores that look like infected insect bites.

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Relatively minor MRSA infections can sometimes develop into more serious complications, such as spread of the infection to surrounding tissues, serious abscesses, blood, bone or heart infections. Early treatment can prevent the infection from getting worse. To keep from spreading MRSA, follow these tips:

- Keep infections covered with clean, dry bandages. This is especially important for infections that continue to produce pus or to drain material.
- Follow your health care provider's instructions on proper care of the wound. Pus from infected wounds can contain bacteria and spread the infection to others.
- Wash your hands after touching infected skin and bandages. Put disposable wastes (e.g., dressings, bandages) in a separate trash bag and close the bag tightly before throwing it out with the regular garbage.
- Advise your family and other close contacts to wash their hands frequently. Caregivers should use gloves and wash hands afterwards if they change your bandages or touch the infected wound or other objects that have been in contact with the wound or wound drainage.
- Do not share personal items (e.g., towels, washcloth, razor, clothing or uniforms) or other items that may have had contact with the infected wound or wound drainage.
- Disinfect all non-clothing (and non-disposable) items that come in contact with the wound with a solution of one tablespoon household bleach mixed in one quart of water (must be prepared fresh each day) or a phenol-containing store-bought cleaning product.
- Wash linens and clothes that become soiled with hot water and laundry detergent. Drying clothes in a hot dryer, rather than air-drying, also helps kill bacteria in clothes.
- Wash utensils and dishes in the usual manner with soap and hot water or use a standard home dishwasher.
- Avoid participating in contact sports or other skin-to-skin contact until your infection has healed.
- If you have a MRSA infection, be sure to tell any health care providers who treat you that you have it.

For more information, visit DPH's Web site <http://chfs.ky.gov/dph/MRSA.htm> or call your local health department. Additional information can be obtained from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site about "Community Associated MRSA," [http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar\\_mrsa\\_ca.html](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_mrsa_ca.html).