

SHANSON D (1999) Obstetric, perinatal and neonatal infections. *In: Microbiology in clinical practice*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Butterworth Heineman, 131-141.

The pregnant mother

Staphylococcus aureus (*S.aureus*) is the most important staphylococcal pathogen of humans. It causes a variety of illnesses, which range from single pustules, to wound infection, to sepsis (presence in the blood), to death.

S.aureus can be transmitted from the nose of a baby infected with a hospital-acquired *S.aureus* infection to the mother's breast while breast feeding and cause a breast abscess.

The newborn baby

Staphylococcus aureus is a frequent cause of minor infection and sepsis in the newborn and is occasionally associated with more serious infections.

More than 30% of newborn babies become colonised with *S.aureus* within their first week of life, particularly the navel, groin, nose, under the arms and the wrists. It is important to note that an advantage of encouraging skin on skin contact between mother and baby is that the baby is then more likely to become colonised with a *staphylococcus* from the mother than from the hospital. **For this reason too, handling of a newborn baby by hospital staff should be kept to a minimum.** Prevention of staphylococcal infections are more likely to be achieved when hospital staff use good hand washing and aseptic techniques.

Symptoms of a *S.aureus* infection include:

- multiple skin pustules that appear after the third day after birth
- 'sticky' eye
- infected umbilical stump

Less common, but more serious infections include:

- [pneumonia](#)
- [septicaemia](#).

Treatment of minor pustules with oral antibiotics is considered unnecessary, but some topical anti-staphylococcal substances, such as 'triple dye' or hexachlorophane may help the condition. Swabs should be collected for more marked sepsis such as 'sticky eye'.

Serious illnesses require antibiotic treatment and blood cultures may be necessary to identify the causative agent and the drugs it is susceptible to. Importantly, most staphylococcal strains are penicillin resistant. It is important that infected infants are isolated and during an outbreak of *S.aureus* the unit may have to be closed temporarily.

MRSA (meticillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*) is a strain of *S.aureus* that has become resistant to the treatments traditionally used to treat staphylococcal infections.

The Department of Health (NHS) has published the 'essential steps to safe, clean care'. This is a delivery programme which aims to reduce healthcare associated infections, including MRSA. The 'essential steps' programme provides tools and guidance to support different organisations and settings, including residential and nursing homes, as they work towards reducing and eradicating healthcare associated infections.

As part of the 'essential steps to safe, clean care' programme, the Department of Health (NHS) has launched a specific step relating to preventing the spread of infection. The aim of this document is to reduce the risk of microbial contamination in everyday practice and to ensure there is a managed environment that minimises the risk of infection to patients, clients, staff and visitor.