

The Food Review

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Death from Staphylococcus aureus

By Bob Jue

Staphylococcus aureus or "Staph" has been implicated in reports of illness from several states and the death of a teenager in Virginia. This organism can be found in our nose, throat, or on our skin.

Usually, staph bacteria don't cause any harm. However, sometimes they get inside the body through a break in the skin and cause an infection. These infections are usually treated with antibiotics. When common antibiotics don't kill the staph bacteria, it



means the bacteria have become resistant to those antibiotics. This type of staph is called MRSA (Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus) and pronounced "mer-sah."

In the community, most MRSA infections are skin infections that may appear as pustules or boils which often are red, swollen, painful, or have pus or other drainage. These skin infections

commonly occur at sites of visible skin trauma, such as cuts and abrasions, and areas of the body covered by hair (e.g., back of neck, groin, buttock, armpit, beard area of men). If the sore does not heal, some people think it is a spider bite.

Why are we discussing this in the Food Review?

Thirty-three percent of us have colonies of staphylococcus in our noses. Staph can be introduced into a cooked food from our hands or from a cough or sneeze. If staph grows in the food, it creates a toxin that causes vomiting and other symptoms in the person who eats the contaminated food. Our grandparents knew this type of food poisoning as 'ptomaine poisoning.' It is a term no longer used.

A food worker may have a boil or draining cut or wound that is a staph infection. This person should be restricted from working with food or clean utensils. A health professional should culture the wound to determine the infection-causing bacteria.

How do you prevent spread to food or other persons?

Handwashing is the best prevention because hands may touch the sore or dressing covering it. Prevention is best accomplished with handwashing using liquid soap (DO NOT USE bar soap), properly using alcohol-gel

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Food Review is sent quarterly, free of charge to all licensed food establishments in our health district. We hope to include news of interest and importance. Topic ideas or articles written by the readers are welcome to be sent to: Editor, Food Review, CDHD, 707 N. Armstrong Pl., Boise, ID 83704. Extra copies of the newsletter are available at your local Health Department office.

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sanitizers containing more than 62% alcohol, and regular bathing. Use paper towels for hand drying. Do not use cloth towels for hand drying.

Disinfecting surfaces that hands touch can also help prevent the spread of disease. Surfaces to clean include door knobs, equipment handles and switches, light switches, menus, toilets, pens/pencils, clipboards, food containers, walk-in and reach-in doors, cutting boards, stove knobs, drawer handles, telephones, computer keyboards and toilets.

MRSA can be found in the community (fortunately, only 1% of us have MRSA colonies in our nose) and direct transmission is from hands or open wounds. Athletic sports are often sources of close contact where staph can be passed from person to person. As previously mentioned, it can be indirectly transmitted to others through cloth towels, sheets, clothes, personal items (combs, razors), and bandages/dressings used to cover sores.

Re-infection is common but can be prevented with good hygiene and handwashing. Antibiotics are available to treat severe infections.

Wound care: Avoid contact with other people's wounds. If you assist someone in changing bandages, wear disposable gloves and discard after one use. Keep the wound clean, dry, and covered.

Wash the clothes of someone with MRSA separately and don't allow their dirty clothes to touch yours. Wash clothes in hot water and dry in high heat. Change bed sheets regularly.

Pets can get MRSA. If your pet has sores, a veterinarian should check them. Pets known to get MRSA are dogs, cats, horses, and birds.

Resources:

www.tpchd.org - click on *Living with MRSA*.

www.cdc.gov - click on M in the A-Z Index and scroll to MRSA.

www.khsaa.org/sportsmedicine/nfhsstatementfinalmrsarevision.pdf - A good sports-related MRSA website.

New Food Establishment Plan Review Fee

Effective December 3, 2007

The Central District Health Department will charge a \$105 plan review fee to regulated or licensed, medium and high-risk food establishments.

The fee will be charged for:

1. New establishment plan reviews
2. Remodels of existing establishments

The plan review fee is a separate fee. The \$65 permit fee for medium and high-risk establishments is still required, with both fees being collected at the time of the plan review. CDHD will continue to conduct plan reviews for low risk food establishments at no charge.

Check Out Our New Website
A whole new look • A whole lot easier
cdhd.idaho.gov

Barriers to Proper Handwashing in the Restaurant Environment

By
Tom Schmalz

A study was recently completed in Oregon concerning handwashing and the results are interesting. Much of this information came from an article in the June 2007 *Journal of Environmental Health*.

The factors that promote good handwashing practices were identified as:

1. Kitchen design and environment
2. Customer influence
3. Proactive health department
4. Training and education
5. Developing good handwashing habits
6. Personal beliefs
7. Attitude



Handwashing occurs more frequently when handwash sinks are in close proximity to the work area. Is your handwash sink in a good location for your employees to use at the correct time when their hands get contaminated? Cleanliness of the kitchen and sink areas and visual reminders such as posters and signs at the handwash sinks encourage handwashing and were considered positive reinforcers.

The public is more aware about handwashing and that is another reason a food service worker should be washing their hands at the appropriate time. If a customer asks, "Did you wash your hands?" the food service worker with good handwashing habits can answer, "Yes." This interaction could result in the customer returning to your food establishment.

Facilities that were visited by proactive health department inspectors were more likely to do better at handwashing too. Food service workers said that they wanted to know more about why handwashing will prevent foodborne illness. They were interested in learning more about the dangers of bacteria and viruses. Some food service workers just do not understand how easily bacteria and viruses can be spread around the establishment. They have personal beliefs about how foodborne illness is transmitted that may be incorrect.

Food service workers believed that managers have to take an active "coaching style" approach to encourage good handwashing habits. Managers should train food service employees to wash their hands at the proper time. Goals and expectations that include handwashing need to be explained.

Food service workers in the study said they have to enter the restaurant with a new awareness because they must always be aware of what they are touching. Habits like wiping your nose or wiping your hand on an apron are difficult to stop once you start. New food service workers have to develop good handwashing habits early in their careers and that responsibility is on the manager and the employee. Managers and supervisors set a positive example by washing their hands upon entering the kitchen.

Food service workers that take pride in their work do a better job of handwashing. This is one reason why the attitude of the employee makes a difference in preventing foodborne illness. One participant of the study said that "It comes down to the consciousness of the guy who knew that he just took out a chicken breast and put it on the grill and then went over and made a salad...and he didn't care."

Handwashing is the best defense against the spread of bacteria and viruses onto food that may cause illness to your customers.

For a quick review of good hygiene practices you can refer your employees to the "Basic Food Safety Video" available for download from the CDHD website at <http://www.cdhd.idaho.gov/EH/food/train.htm>.

If you want to read the entire article, contact Tom Schmalz at 327-8587.



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United Water Offers Free Spray Valves

Are you a commercial kitchen looking to save water and money? United Water Idaho is offering free low flow pre-rinse spray valves and installation to its commercial kitchen customers. In some instances, nearly one-half of the water used in dishwashing is consumed by the pre-rinse spray. Conserving water is important in our valley. With this program you will be conserving a precious natural resource and save money on your water bill. Is it time to consider a change?

United Water provides the pre-rinse spray and the installation, all you have to do is call. The requirements for this program are: your kitchen pre-rinse spray nozzle must be an older model, prior to the 2005 Energy Policy Act and you must be a United Water Idaho customer.

Older spray valves use 3.0 Gallons Per Minute (GPM). These new spray valves dramatically reduce water by using 1.6 GPM. United Water will replace your old spray valve with a new valve which meets the requirements for flow rate and cleanability as certified by The American Society for Testing and Materials.

If you are interested in this conservation opportunity, please call Stephanie Raddatz, United Water Idaho Outreach/Education Coordinator at 362-7336. This program will begin in 2008.

For more information on United Water visit www.unitedwater.com/uwid/



Employees Must Wash Hands

HOW

Wet

warm water



Wash

20 seconds
Use soap



Rinse



Dry

Use single-service
paper towels



Gloves



WHEN

Wash your hands before you prepare food or as often as needed.

Wash after you:

- use the toilet
- touch uncooked meat, poultry, fish, eggs or other potentially hazardous foods
- interrupt working with food (such as answering the phone, opening a door or drawer)
- eat, smoke or chew gum
- touch soiled plates, utensils or equipment
- take out trash
- touch your nose, mouth, or any part of your body
- sneeze or cough

Do not touch ready-to-eat foods with your bare hands.

- Use gloves, tongs, deli tissue or other serving utensils.
- Remove all jewelry, nail polish or false nails unless you wear gloves.

Wear gloves

- when you have a cut or sore on your hand
- when you can't remove your jewelry

If you wear gloves

- wash your hands before you put on new gloves

Change them

- as often as you wash your hands
- when they are torn or soiled

