

# Study confirms golden staph a public health threat to children

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

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Australian children has found higher death rates if the right antibiotic is not used to treat the infection.

The study, published today in *JAMA Pediatrics*, also found more than 70 per cent of these golden staph infections are acquired in the community rather than in hospital settings.

*Staphylococcus aureus*, more commonly referred to as golden staph, is a bacterium that lives on the skin or in the nose, causing a range of mild to severe infections and in some cases death. Approximately 350 Australian children are admitted to hospitals each year with potentially fatal golden staph infections in their blood.

The study is the first to describe how common golden staph bloodstream infections are in Australian and New Zealand children. Infections were found to be three times more common in Australian Indigenous children than in non-Indigenous Australian children and five times in Māori children compared with non-Māori children.

First author Dr Brendan McMullan, a paediatric infectious diseases specialist and microbiologist at UNSW, said parents should be aware of the bug.

"Governments also need to reduce the burden and impact of these infections with a focus on Indigenous and Māori/Pacific children. Doctors should also be aware of the risk of serious staphylococcal infections, especially among these groups," Dr McMullan said.

The study also examined the impact of different treatments for golden staph in children and found that a common antibiotic treatment, vancomycin, wasn't as effective as other therapies. The mortality rate was 14 per cent in children with sensitive golden staph treated with vancomycin compared with 2.6 per cent in [children](#) treated with

alternative antibiotics.

Associate Professor Steven Tong, an NHMRC Career Development Fellow at the Menzies School of Health Research and a Royal Melbourne Hospital (RMH) infectious diseases physician, said treatment with the right antibiotic was crucial.

"Treating golden staph that is sensitive to penicillin-like antibiotics with vancomycin, one of our last line antibiotics, rather than with penicillin-like antibiotics, results in higher mortality rates."

**More information:** McMullan BJ, Bowen A, Blyth CC, et al. Epidemiology and Mortality of Staphylococcus aureus Bacteremia in Australian and New Zealand Children. *JAMA Pediatr.* Published online August 15, 2016. [DOI: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2016.1477](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2016.1477)

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