

Staph infections drop, but levels still worry U.S. health officials

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(HealthDay)—Dangerous staph infections are declining in America, but

they still pose a significant public health threat, a new report from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows.

"Today, we are talking about an [infection](#) that's all too common, one of the leading causes of deadly infections in [health care](#) and in the community—[staph](#)," CDC Principal Deputy Director Dr. Anne Schuchat said during a media briefing Tuesday.

"Staph is so common that most all of us carry it on our skin," she said. "But staph becomes very dangerous when it gets into the blood. Staph can cause blood system infections that can lead to sepsis or death.

"The bottom line is this: We have prevented many staph infections, but while we've made important progress, the data show that more needs to be done to stop all types of staph infection," Schuchat said.

The opioid epidemic might be one reason why *Staphylococcus aureus* (staph) infections have increased in the community, even as they have declined in hospitals, the CDC researchers added.

Injection drug users accounted for 9 percent of all serious staph infections in 2016, up from 4 percent in 2011, the CDC analysis showed.

To reduce the risk of staph infections among injection drug users, doctors should connect them with drug-addiction treatment services and provide information on safe injection practices, wound care, and how to recognize early signs of infection, the CDC said.

In 2017, more than 119,000 Americans had staph infections, and nearly 20,000 died, according to the agency.

That includes dangerous antibiotic-resistant forms of staph, such as methicillin-resistant *S. aureus* (MRSA) and methicillin-susceptible *S.*

aureus (MSSA) bloodstream infections.

While MRSA may be better known, all staph infections can be deadly, the CDC said.

The analysis of nationwide data showed that MRSA bloodstream infections in health care facilities fell about 17 percent each year between 2005 and 2012. However, those reductions have recently started to wane, which is raising concerns, according to the CDC's *Vital Signs* report.

It also said that each year between 2012 to 2017, there was a nearly 4 percent rise in MSSA infections that began outside of health care facilities.

"Staph infections are a serious threat and can be deadly," CDC Director Dr. Robert Redfield said in an agency news release. "U.S. hospitals have made significant progress, but this report tells us that all [staph infections](#) must remain a prevention priority for [health care providers](#)."

People are at greatest risk for a serious staph infection when they stay in [health care facilities](#) or have surgery, when [medical devices](#) are placed in their body, when they inject drugs, or when they have close contact with someone who has staph, the CDC said.

Ways to reduce the spread of staph in the community include keeping hands clean, covering wounds, and not sharing items that contact skin, such as towels, razors and needles.

More information: The U.S. National Library of Medicine has more on [staph infections](#).

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