



# Staphylococcus aureus (*S. aureus*)

## What is it?

- *Staphylococcus aureus* is a common bacterium that lives on the skin or in the nose. It is sometimes called 'golden staph'. In most situations, *S. aureus* is harmless. If it enters the body through a cut in the skin, it can cause a range of mild to severe infections, which may cause death in some cases.
- The incubation period (time taken from swallowing the toxins until illness starts) is often as little as 2 to 6 hours of eating.
- The illness usually lasts for between less than 12 hours and 2 days.

## Where is it found?

- Humans and animals are the primary sources of staphylococci.
- Staphylococci also exist in air, dust, sewage, water, milk and food.
- Food handlers are usually the main source of contamination in food poisoning outbreaks.
- Equipment and environmental surfaces can be sources of contamination.
- Foods frequently implicated in staphylococcal food poisoning incidents include meat and meat products, poultry and egg products and milk and dairy products.

## Why is it a problem?

- Common symptoms of staphylococcal food poisoning include nausea, vomiting, retching, abdominal cramping and prostration.



- The onset of symptoms is usually rapid and may be acute.
- Recovery generally takes two to three days but may be longer in severe cases.

## Who is at risk?

Everyone is at risk of staphylococcal food poisoning, although symptoms may be more severe among the elderly, infants and immuno-compromised persons.

## How can the risk be reduced?

Simple hygiene measures can be used to effectively control and prevent shigellosis. These primarily include:

- Keep cool foods below 4°C.
- Keep hot foods above 60°C.
- Cool cooked food quickly.
- Use clean utensils to handle food.
- Keep hands clean and wash with soap after using the bathroom or handling raw foods.
- Keep open wounds covered.