

Spider Bite or Staph Infection? Diagnosis is Important

Barb Ogg
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A new study published in the New England Journal of Medicine found 59 percent of skin infections in emergency room visits were resistant to a major group of antibiotics including penicillin and methicillin. These infections were caused by a bacterium, known as methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA).

Many patients believed the infections were initially caused by a spider bite, perhaps because the lesion seemed to appear without any other associated injury. However, this scenario is also typical of MRSA infections which may start as a bump or pimple, which turns into a boil or abscess. These infections are often red, swollen, painful and have pus or other drainage.

An open wound may

result from a brown recluse spider bite. However, brown recluse spiders do not transmit bacteria in their venom. Instead, they inject a cytotoxic venom into the flesh. The term *cytotoxic* means the venom kills cells and dissolves

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the tissue around the bite. A brown recluse spider bite may take several months to heal and medical attention is often needed. Because MRSA infections may look superficially like brown recluse spider bites, they can be misdiagnosed, which may hinder recovery.

In southeast Nebraska, documented bites from brown

recluse spiders are relatively rare, due to the reclusive nature of this spider.

To determine if an infection is MRSA, a skin culture is needed to determine what type of bacteria is causing the infection and test it for antibi-

otic resistance. The doctor will then be able to prescribe antibiotics which are most likely to work. It usually takes several days to obtain the results of a skin culture. Most of the time, MRSA is easily treated.

Because the MRSA staph infections are increasing in the general population, it is important to see a doctor if a painful sore on the skin appears without any apparent cause. Correct diagnosis will speed recovery.

Source: Methicillin-Resistant S. aureus Infections among Patients in the Emergency Department N ENGL J MED 2006. 355:666-74.

Keep Out Unwanted Pests



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Millipedes (left) and wolf spiders (right) are common "accidental invaders" in homes during fall.

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Cooler temperatures are here and you may find a few uninvited guests making their way into your home. Millipedes, crickets and wolf spiders are some common "accidental invaders" stumbling into homes trying to escape the chill of fall. Most of these visitors are not going to cause a problem because they won't be able to survive in the home environment. Homes are too dry and there probably won't be enough food to keep these pests alive.

Many of these short-lived visitors can be controlled without pesticides—a fly swatter, broom or vacuum will work nicely. Gently sweep the beneficial wolf spider into a jar and release it outside away from the house. Snakes who find their way into the home should also be captured and released.

Accidental invaders are not the only creatures looking for a safe haven. Mice and rats quickly take advantage of unchecked openings around the home. These creatures,

unlike accidental invaders, can take up permanent residence in your house damaging your property and possibly spreading disease. Their control can be more difficult and expensive if they become established.

Protect your home from unwanted guests by "pest-proofing." By taking a few moments now to inspect your property, you may prevent rodents, snakes and insects from using your home as a winter hideaway.

Here are some things you might look for:

- Make sure all cracks around the outside of your house are sealed so mice, rats, snakes and insects can't squeeze in (rats can get through openings 1/2-inch in diameter—mice can get through holes no bigger than a dime). To fill openings, use something strong like cement, mortar or caulk. Steel wool can be used as a temporary fix. Stuffing cracks with cloth won't help and rodents may use it for bedding.
- Holes and other rodent damage in your home or garage need to be repaired and protected. Make repairs and, if necessary, cover the

damage with hardware cloth (1/4-inch squares). If you cover rodent damage with a piece of wood, rodents may chew right through it again.

- Doors, windows and screens should be in good repair and fit tightly. Caulking will also keep pests out and help lower fuel bills.
- Do your floor drains need screens? If so, ask a professional to help you select the screen size.
- Check around your dryer vent and other openings to make sure they aren't being used as a handy way to get into your house.
- Removing leaves and grass clippings from around the foundation, cleaning out window wells and general yard clean-up will get rid of hiding places for pests near the home.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

UNL Extension in Lancaster County has many educational resources about pest problems in and around the home. These resources are available at the extension office or online at <http://lanaster.unl.edu/pest>

Tips to Prevent Recurrent Head Lice Infestations



Combing with a nit comb is essential to removing eggs/nits and lice not killed by lice products.

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Almost all parents today have to deal with head lice. Experts believe head lice are usually transmitted by head-to-head contact.

Treatments are not as effective as they were a generation ago. Lice have developed resistance to the most commonly available over-the-counter (pyrethroid) products. Resistance means some lice will survive treatments and continue to develop and reproduce. Within a month or two, the child again will have a full-blown lice infestation.

What can parents do to prevent recurrence of head lice?

- Because of head lice resistance to pyrethrin-type products, parents should not rely on these commonly used over-the-counter products to cure a head lice infestation. One alternative product that may work well against resistant lice is called HairClean 1-2-3. It is a mixture of anise oil, ylang ylang oil and coconut oil in isopropyl alcohol. Studies have shown it is at least as effective as Nix. Find it at health food stores.
- Combing hair with a nit comb may be necessary to remove both live lice and eggs.

But, the tiniest lice are only a little larger than the eggs and very hard to see. An electronic comb (Robi comb) can be useful to double check and make sure all the live lice are gone. This electronic comb will detect even the tiniest lice. This comb is available at many pharmacies and costs about \$30.

- If repeated head lice infestations occur, all members of the household—even adults—should be checked for lice.
- Girls are more likely to get lice than boys. Girls with long hair are more likely to get lice than girls with short hair. It is advisable to pull back long hair or put it in a ponytail to keep it from dragging.
- Studies have shown head lice are not often found on floors, combs or brushes and clothing. It makes little sense to spray pesticides and launder repeatedly. Instead focus efforts on the infested person.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

UNL Extension in Lancaster County has many head lice resources you can trust (in English, Spanish and Arabic) available at the extension office or online at <http://lanaster.unl.edu/pest/lice>

Household Hazardous Waste Collection, Oct. 14

The last hazardous waste collection for 2006 is Saturday, Oct. 14 from 9 a.m.–3 p.m. at the State Fair Park 4-H Youth Complex. These collections are for household only; not for businesses. Only residents of Lincoln and Lancaster County can bring items to collections. For more information, call the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department at 441-8040.

Items You Can Bring for Disposal

Heavy metals: items containing mercury such as thermometers and thermostats.
Solvents: mineral spirits, turpentine, paint strippers and thinners, oil-based paints, varnishes, stains, polishes and waxes.
Pesticides: weed killers, garden sprays, wood preservatives, roach powder, rat poisons. You may also bring EPA-banned products, like DDT, chlordane, 2,4,5-T, pentachlorophenol, silvex, PCP.

Items containing PCB's: Ballasts from old fluorescent fixtures and capacitors from old appliances including radios, motors and televisions.

Do not bring: latex paint, medicines, fertilizers, explosives and ammunition. Batteries, antifreeze and used oil will not be accepted because these items can be recycled.