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## NF93-159 Staphylococcus aureus

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## *Staphylococcus aureus*

*By Julie A. Albrecht, Extension Food Specialist  
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- The Disease:** The toxin produced by *Staphylococcus aureus* causes the illness staphylococcal intoxication. Symptoms of this intoxication include nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. They usually occur from 30 minutes to eight hours after eating an item contaminated with the toxin produced by the bacteria.
- The Organism:** *Staphylococcus aureus* (commonly referred to as "staph") is part of our natural microflora. The bacteria grows to higher numbers in pimples, sores and when we have a cold. The bacteria grows best at our body temperature. Staph can multiply rapidly in food held at room temperature and toxins can be produced. This toxin is called an enterotoxin because it causes gastroenteritis or inflammation of the lining of the intestinal tract. Thorough cooking destroys *Staphylococcus aureus* bacteria, but the toxin is very resistant to heat, refrigeration, and freezing.
- Sources:** *Staphylococcus aureus* bacteria are found on our skin, in infected cuts and pimples, and in our noses and throats. These bacteria are spread by transferring staph from our hands to foods. When food which contains this bacteria is held at room temperature, staph multiplies and produces the toxin. Staph grows well in cooked foods which are high in protein. Common foods associated with staph intoxication include salads — meat, poultry, cheese, potato, pasta. Staph also grows well in foods high in sugar or salt which inhibits the growth of more sensitive bacteria. Cream pies, cream filled bakery items, custards, and ham are foods which have resulted in staph intoxication.
- Control:** Proper hand washing techniques, clean utensils and clean food preparation surfaces are necessary to prevent the transfer of the bacteria to the food especially foods such as salads that are not heated after preparation. Foods should be kept refrigerated until use and not left out at room temperature for more than two hours. Salads can be held on ice when served.

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