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Medical Author: [Melissa Conrad Stöppler, MD](#)
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What is cellulitis? What are cellulitis symptoms and signs?

Cellulitis is a bacterial infection of the skin and tissues beneath the skin. Cellulitis usually begins as a small area of tenderness, swelling, and redness that spreads to adjacent skin. As this red area begins to enlarge, the affected person may develop a [fever](#) -- sometimes with [chills](#) and sweats -- and [swollen lymph nodes](#) ("swollen glands") near the area of infected skin.

Unlike [impetigo](#), which is a very superficial skin infection, cellulitis is an infection that also involves the skin's deeper layers: the dermis and subcutaneous tissue. The main

Doctor to Patient

Cellulitis Symptoms

Medical Author: [Melissa Conrad Stöppler, MD](#)
Medical Editor: [Dennis Lee, MD](#)

What is cellulitis?

Cellulitis is a common infection of the lower layers of skin (dermis) and the subcutaneous tissues (areas underneath the skin) caused by a bacterial infection. While cellulitis sometimes develops around wounds in the skin or surgical incisions, in other cases it arises without an obvious source for the bacterial infection. *Staphylococci* are the bacteria that most commonly cause cellulitis, followed by *Streptococci*. Less commonly, other types of bacteria may cause cellulitis.



What are the symptoms of cellulitis?

Cellulitis usually begins as a small area of pain and redness on the skin. This area

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What is methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA)?

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bacteria responsible for cellulitis are *Streptococcus* and *Staphylococcus* ("staph"), the same bacteria that can cause impetigo. [MRSA](#) (methicillin-resistant *Staph aureus*) can also cause cellulitis.

Sometimes, other bacteria (for example, *Hemophilus influenzae*, *Pneumococcus*, and *Clostridium* species) may cause cellulitis as well.

spreads to surrounding tissues, resulting in the typical signs of inflammation – redness, swelling, warmth, and pain. A person with cellulitis can also develop [fever](#) and/or swollen lymph nodes in the area of the infection.

[Find out how cellulitis is treated »](#)

Where does cellulitis occur?

Cellulitis may occur anywhere on the body, but the lower leg is the most common site of the infection (particularly in the area of the tibia or shinbone and in the foot), followed by the arm, and then the head and neck areas. In special circumstances, such as following surgery or trauma wounds, cellulitis can develop in the abdomen or chest areas. People with morbid [obesity](#) can also develop cellulitis in the abdominal skin. Special types of cellulitis are sometimes designated by the location of the infection. Examples include periorbital (around the eye socket) cellulitis, buccal (cheek) cellulitis, facial cellulitis, and perianal cellulitis.

What does cellulitis look like?

The signs of cellulitis include redness, warmth, swelling, and pain in the involved tissues. Any skin wound or ulcer that exhibits these signs may be developing cellulitis.

Other forms of noninfected inflammation may mimic cellulitis. People with poor leg circulation, for instance, often develop scaly redness on the shins and ankles; this is called "[stasis dermatitis](#)" and is often mistaken for the bacterial infection of cellulitis.

MRSA stands for methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (*S. aureus*) bacteria. This organism is known for causing skin infections in addition to many other types of infections. There are other designations in the scientific literature for these bacteria according to where the bacteria are acquired by patients, such as community-acquired MRSA (CA-MRSA or CMRSA), hospital-acquired or health-care-acquired MRSA (HA-MRSA or HMRSA), or epidemic MRSA (EMRSA). Statistical data suggest that as many as 19,000 people per year die from MRSA in the U.S.; current data suggest this number has declined by about 25%-35% in recent years, in part, because of prevention practices at hospitals and home care.

Although *S. aureus* has been causing infections (Staph infections) probably as long as the human race has existed, MRSA has a relatively short history. MRSA was first noted in 1961, ab...

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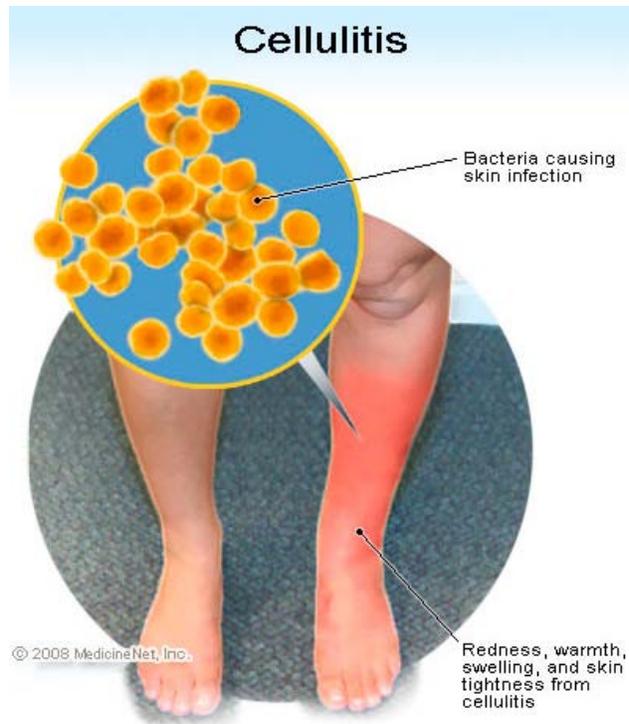
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