



NECROTIZING FASCIITIS FACT SHEET

October 28, 2004

Definition: A serious but rare infection of the deeper layer of skin and subcutaneous tissue. While many bacteria can cause necrotizing fasciitis, most cases result from Group A streptococcus.

How are the bacteria that cause necrotizing fasciitis spread?

Fortunately the strep bacteria that cause the infection are **NOT** easily spread through casual contact or by indirect contact through objects. They are spread by direct contact with patients or carriers (people who have the bacteria in their noses or throats but are not ill) or from large respiratory droplets (from coughs or sneezes) that generally cannot travel more than three feet. **Only close contacts** of someone with necrotizing fasciitis are considered to be at slight risk of contracting the bacteria. Close contacts are those people who share eating utensils, share cups or food, or live in the same household as the affected individual.

What symptoms should you watch for?

- Any **close contact** who develops a sore throat, fever, severe muscle pain or suspicious wound (red, swollen, and painful) should seek medical care **IMMEDIATELY** for evaluation. Do not wait until the next day. The infection can be treated effectively if caught early.
- **Casual contacts**, such as those whose contact is limited to speaking with or being in the same room with the affected individual, are not at risk.

How can you prevent infection?

- The best prevention is always good hygiene. Wash your hands frequently with hot water and soap – and remember to turn off the faucet and open the door with paper towels.
- Alternatively, you can use an alcohol gel hand sanitizer.
- Although the chances are very low that strep bacteria would be spread by indirect contact with objects or surfaces, just to be on the safe side, we are recommending that all surfaces be cleaned with one of the following: 1% bleach; 70% ethanol; Opticide cleaner; or a good general disinfectant such as Lysol spray (not the pump or liquid).

For more information, you may contact:

Boulder County Dept. of Public Health, Communicable Disease Control: (303) 413-7503