

Boils

Boils can occur anywhere on your skin, but appear mainly on the face, back of the neck, armpits, thighs and buttocks. Any areas with hair, where you sweat more, or where there is friction.

Frequent Signs & Symptoms

- A painful, red bump that starts out small and can enlarge to more than 2 inches (5 centimeters).
- Red, swollen skin around the bump.
- An increase in the size of the bump over a few days as it fills with pus.
- Development of a yellow-white tip that eventually ruptures and allows the pus to drain out.

Causes

Most boils are caused by *Staphylococcus aureus*, a bacteria commonly found on the skin and inside the nose. A bump forms as pus collects under the skin. Boils sometimes develop at sites where the skin has been broken by a small injury or an insect bite, which gives the bacteria easy entry.

Prevention

If you have an area of skin that is prone to boils:

- Keep the area clean and dry
- Avoid wearing tight clothing
- Washing daily with antibacterial soap
- Change razors frequently
- Good handwashing
- Don't share razors, towels, etc.

Diagnosis

Your provider will likely be able to diagnose a boil simply by looking at it. A sample of the pus may be collected sent to the lab for testing. This is sometimes done to determine the bacteria causing the boils it may be useful if you have recurring infections or an infection that hasn't responded to standard treatment.

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Treatment

You can generally treat small boils at home by applying warm compresses to relieve pain and promote natural drainage. If it fails to improve or changes, your provider may:

- Do an *Incision and Drainage* (I&D). Your provider may drain a boil by making an incision in it. Deep boils that can't be completely drained may be packed with sterile gauze to help soak up and remove additional pus
- Prescribe Antibiotics

When to See Your Provider

Make an appointment with your provider if:

- You have diabetes.
- Is located on the face, rectum, groin or spine
- Produces fever or severe pain.
- Interferes with movement.
- Causes swelling, red streaks or other discoloration in nearby skin.
- If you have been on antibiotics for a couple of days and your boil does not appear to be getting better.
- If you have reoccurring boils within a short period of time.

Complications

Rarely, bacteria from a boil can enter your bloodstream and travel to other parts of your body. The spreading infection, commonly known as blood poisoning (sepsis).

If symptoms worsen or do not improve, return to the clinic.

If you have worsening of symptoms when the Health and Wellness Center is unavailable, please follow up with the local ER or Urgent Care.