

# UniversityHealthServices

*We heal. We educate. We care.*

## **BOILS (FURUNCLES)**

### **What is a boil?**

Boils are painful swellings of the skin caused by deep infection with bacteria. Another term for a boil is a skin abscess. The bacteria which cause the infection enter the skin from the outside, usually through a hair opening. Boils begin as red, tender swellings. Later, the infection produces pus, which may “form a head.” This pus may drain spontaneously or need to be opened surgically.

### **Why do boils occur?**

There are many causes of boils. They can arise from an ingrown hair, splinter, acne, or blocked sweat glands. Any skin injury (simple cut or scrape) could develop into an abscess. Some people are more vulnerable to developing boils.

### **Treatment**

Treatment for a boil can begin at home as soon as it is noticed. Warm compresses applied for 30 minutes every several hours will help to localize the infection and may facilitate spontaneous drainage. If the boil does not drain on its own, it may need to be “lanced” or drained by a health care provider. (It is important for a patient *not to try to squeeze or drain an abscess themselves*. If it is not done at the right time, the right way or with the proper instruments, the infection could spread.) Resting the infected area may also help.

Antibiotics are also often used to treat the bacterial infection.

### **When to seek care**

- A boil that worsens rapidly or is extremely painful
- Large boils / frequent boils
- A boil that has not healed in 2 weeks
- A boil associated with fever or red lines radiating from it
- Having a condition that can be associated with a weakened immune system (e.g. cancer, organ transplantation, HIV infection, diabetes or oral prednisone treatment)

If your boil doesn't improve after treatment, please return. A different antibiotic or minor surgery may be needed.

### **Test Results and Advice Nurse**

Please call the nurse for test results and advice: 863-4463

### **Appointments**

Appointments can be made in person or by phone. If you are unable to keep your appointment, please call and cancel. Otherwise you will be charged for the visit.

To schedule or cancel appointments, call: 863-0774

For more information about health care issues, visit the UHS Web site at [www.sa.psu.edu/uhs](http://www.sa.psu.edu/uhs)

This publication is available in alternative media on request.

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