

## **FACT SHEET**

### **Staphylococcus aureus**

#### **Common clinical features**

Typically, an abrupt onset of nausea, vomiting and prostration often accompanied by diarrhoea. Illness lasts for 1-2 days.

#### **Incubation period**

30 minutes to 8 hours, usually 2 – 4 hours.

#### **Where is it found?**

Human skin – carried by 25–30% of individuals. Rarely, infected cow udders lead to contaminated milk.

#### **How is it acquired by affected individuals?**

Food handlers contaminate food that is left at room temperature for several hours, so that the bacteria multiply and produce the toxin in the food. Food handlers with infected skin lesions such as boils are a particular risk.

#### **How does the laboratory confirm the diagnosis?**

Toxin of the bacteria may be detected in food. High counts of *Staphylococcus aureus* may be found in faeces of affected individuals but occasionally high counts are present in faeces of individuals with no symptoms. The test results will usually be available in 2 days, but tests will only be carried out if *Staphylococcus aureus* is strongly suspected as the cause of illness.

#### **How is it treated?**

Rehydration and symptomatic treatment.