Nurse Dies From Infected Thumb



The victim was a nurse at a care facility. She had cut her thumb while moving a wheelchair, and the thumb was painful and swollen. She was worried that she'd dislocated it, so she went to hospital. She was given medicine for the pain and sent home.

Three days later the nurse's arm was doubled in size and leaking fluid, and she was in terrific pain. Her husband took her to hospital, where doctors diagnosed necrotizing fasciitis, or flesh-eating disease. Doctors said it was impossible to know where she contracted the bacteria.

To save the woman's life, surgeons amputated her arm at the collarbone and removed all the tissue on the left side of her torso. Despite these efforts, the woman died within hours.

Flesh-eating disease is a variant of streptococcus, the same bacteria that causes painful, swollen strep throat. It's a hazard in the healthcare industry, but turns up in other areas.

To reduce your chances of many kinds of infections:

- **Wash your hands:** the simplest and most necessary step. Wash before and after any activity that brings your hands near your mouth, eyes, or other body openings.
- **Care for wounds:** any cut or puncture can act as a portal for microbes. Wash out cuts thoroughly and dress with a sterile bandage.
- **Avoid bodily fluids:** Disinfect surfaces or implement that have had blood or other bodily fluids on it. If you work where contact is a risk, get training in how to safely deal with potential infections.
- **Follow other infection control precautions:** Follow all recommended procedures to avoid exposure to bloodborne illnesses, respiratory illnesses and other potentially lethal infections. Source: Associated Press, March 13, 2006