

## Antibiotic Hunters | Jessi's Story

# Transcript

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- Hi, my name is Jessi Zimmerman. I'm an instructor at UW-Green Bay, and I'd like to talk to you about an infection I had in high school. I've been interested in science since probably about sixth grade, but I think the microbiology part really started to peak after the staph infection. I wanted to know how I got sick, why I got sick. Why was I sick for so long? So that's when I really, I guess, got the bug, so to speak. So I really wanted to learn more.

Well, I was 15 years old when I saw the first boil. It appeared on my knee. It was rather large. And at that time, I wasn't really sure what it was. But I wasn't particularly scared at the time or alarmed. But when the doctor came in, she took one look at it and she started putting on what they now call PPE. And when she puts on the extra gown and the extra pair of gloves and this large visor over her face, I was a little taken back.

And so she lances it and tells me she needs to take a culture of it. And I would find out in a few days if this was something that I need to be worried about, if it was a resistant strain or if this was just your typical staph infection.

You don't generally get sick from staph, especially Staph aureus. It's something that we normally carry on our skin. The only way you get sick is usually if you're immune compromised, or in my case, there was a cut on my skin and the bacteria was able to get in.

She had called in antibiotics for the first boil. But as time went on, one boil turned into 20 boils, and it was within a week that my legs were covered. I had painful boils all over my skin and it was difficult to wear clothing. And it came down to that wearing jeans was no longer really an option because when I would wear them, the boils would break open and it would stick to my skin. And it was painful and it was, quite frankly, gross and embarrassing.

And at the time, we had no idea why is this spreading and why is it spreading so quickly? And what can I do because I'm taking my antibiotics and it seemed like it went away for a little bit, but then it came back with a vengeance. All of a sudden it just exploded and it was, it was everywhere. Maybe a few days after I'd been on the antibiotics, I had a call back and I was told that I had MRSA, but of course at the time I had no idea what MRSA was. I think when the doctor told me that it was antibiotic-resistant bacteria, I understood the words, but not the gravity of the situation. I heard what she was saying, that we're gonna have to use different medicine to treat this, but I had no concept that it was going to be with me for a while, that we were gonna have to throw a lot of medications at this.

And so now I've been on antibiotics for, I'd say probably about 10 days and they went away for a little bit, but then I got a resurgence and they spread through my legs yet again. And a couple of months later, I had a resurgence on my arms and unfortunately, this ends up going on for most of my high school career, on and off. So it was just kind of waiting again, when's it gonna come back? It could be when I had, you know, a cheerleading meet and I didn't have the ability to cover my legs. I always was afraid somebody would find out, and some people did find out. They were afraid they'd catch this terrible infection that I had. I felt like I

was ostracized, that nobody wanted me near them. High schoolers can be harsh, you know? So I thought if people knew I had it, that I'd be seen differently and certainly people wouldn't want to be around me 'cause they might catch it too.

It was three years of having infections and not just the pain, but just the emotional responsibility of "Am I gonna pass this on to somebody else?" So when I found out that I had another option for an antibiotic that would be stronger and could wipe this infection out once and for all, I was incredibly excited to try something else. We were prescribed Bactroban Nasal, which is, it's a gel that's put in a syringe and you squeeze it up your nose. It's used that way because often, Staph aureus, it lives in your nose. And so you can clear up an infection by using the nasal treatment.

Research for antibiotic resistance is really important right now because in the upcoming decades, we won't have enough antibiotics to fight super bugs or the bacteria that's resistant to antibiotics. I hope with more awareness and continued research that more people can be involved in the field, and then people won't have to go through what I went through when I was younger. Who knows, the next researcher could be you.