

A Germ of Truth

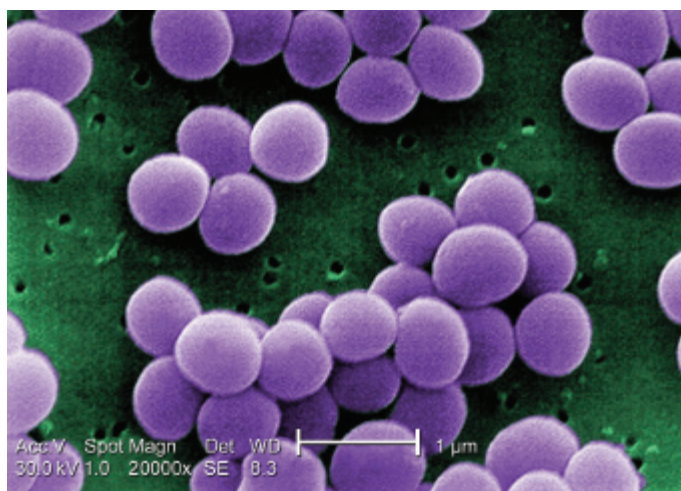
Each of the following excerpts and images tells a story about germs. Can you tell fact from fiction? Hint: Sometimes fiction can contain facts, but informational texts never use fiction.

Red Bread

Excerpted from Food Intruders, by Karen M. Leet

Possibly the weirdest bread spoiler is not a fungus but a bacterium that's only one one-thousandth of a millimeter long. It causes wet red spots on bread and has the disgusting name of bleeding bread.

Health experts say not to eat moldy food—or “bleeding” food either. Molds can cause breathing and allergy problems. Some molds make a poison called mycotoxin, which can make people very sick. If you find moldy or rotting food, throw it away and clean up the area where you found it. You don't want any of those microbes spreading around.



Under a very high magnification of 20,000x, this scanning electron micrograph (SEM) shows a strain of *Staphylococcus aureus* bacteria.

Picture and information provided by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Public Health Image Library.

Excerpt from “Staphylococcus Aureus - Food Poisoning”

From Germ Stories, a collection of poems by Arthur Kornberg

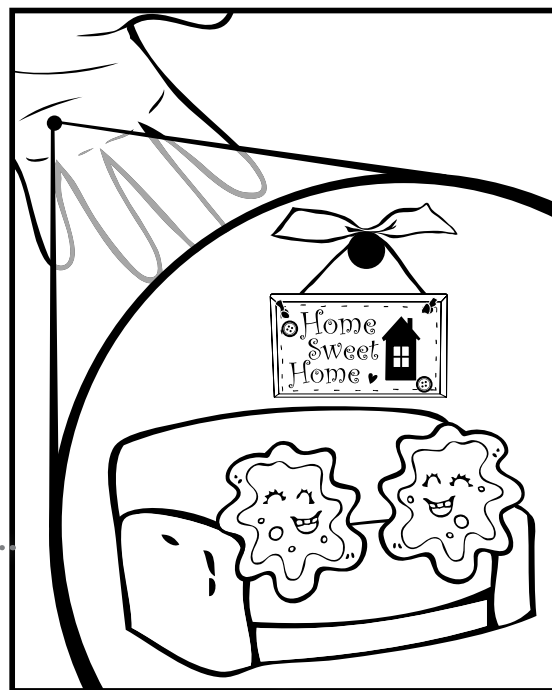
Staph aureus is on your hands and in your hair.
It's in your nose—it's everywhere!

If you prick your skin, it enters and thrives:
Millions of germs, very much alive.

From a baker's hand on a rare occasion
Some Staph broke out for a new invasion,

This time into a warm custard pie
Baked that day. Oh, dear. Oh, my!

In the pie, germs grew and frolicked
And spewed out poisons that can cause colic.



Excerpt from “Surprisingly Hardy Flu Germs”

By Stephen Ornes, Published December 14, 2011 in Science News for Kids (full version is available online)

For a human, an infection often means getting sick. But for a virus, an infection means survival.

Viruses are tiny, disease-causing germs that can reproduce only inside organisms they've invaded. If these microbes end up outside the body, expelled through the nose by a sneeze or wiped on a sleeve, it's hard for them to survive. When they're unable to infect anything, viruses dry up and eventually die.

But that might be a long time, according to a team of scientists in France that recently put nasty viruses to the test. The team found that under the right conditions, a virus outside a host might survive and be able to cause infections for more than six months.

The scientists tested samples of the virus that causes H1N1 flu, better known as swine flu. The scientists found that the viruses sputtered out a day after being immersed in hot temperatures and surrounded by salty water. But at cooler temperatures and in less salty water, H1N1 retained its ability to cause infections for months.