

# Unlocking the secrets of *Staphylococcus aureus*: PCR detection and beyond

Joelle Arieno\*

Department of Microbiology, Cornell University, Ithaca, USA

## INTRODUCTION

In the ever evolving landscape of microbiology, the ability to accurately and swiftly detect pathogenic microorganisms has become an indispensable tool for both clinical and research purposes. Among the many notorious culprits causing infectious diseases in humans, *Staphylococcus aureus* stands out as a formidable adversary. This bacterium is a versatile pathogen, responsible for a wide range of infections, from superficial skin lesions to life threatening diseases, such as endocarditis and sepsis. Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) has revolutionized the detection of *Staphylococcus aureus* by offering unparalleled sensitivity, specificity, and rapid results. In this article, we will explore the ins and outs of PCR detection of *Staphylococcus aureus*, its significance and the future directions in this field.

## DESCRIPTION

### The *Staphylococcus aureus* Menace

*Staphylococcus aureus*, commonly referred to as "Staph," is a gram positive bacterium that colonizes the skin and mucous membranes of humans and animals. It is part of the normal flora in approximately 30% of individuals, typically causing no harm. However, when the delicate balance between host and microbe is disrupted, *Staphylococcus aureus* can transform from a harmless commensal into a ruthless pathogen. It is notorious for causing a variety of diseases, ranging from minor skin infections to severe systemic conditions.

One of the most pressing concerns related to *Staphylococcus aureus* is its ability to develop resistance to antibiotics. Methicillin Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) is a well-known example of a strain that has become resistant to multiple antibiotics, posing a significant threat in healthcare settings. This highlights the urgency of rapid and accurate detection methods to prevent and manage *Staphylococcus aureus* infections effectively.

### PCR: The molecular detective

PCR is a powerful molecular biology technique that has revolutionized the field of microbiology by allowing for the rapid detection and quantification of specific DNA sequences. The technique was first described by Kary Mullis in 1983 and has since become a cornerstone of modern molecular biology and microbiology.

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#### Address for correspondence:

Dr. Joelle Arieno,  
Department of Microbiology, Cornell University, Ithaca, USA  
E-mail: Arieno541@gmail.com

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The fundamental principle of PCR involves the amplification of a target DNA sequence using a pair of primers and a DNA polymerase enzyme. In the context of *Staphylococcus aureus* detection, researchers focus on amplifying specific genes or regions that are unique to this bacterium. One of the most common targets for *Staphylococcus aureus* detection is the gene that encodes the staphylococcal protein A (spa), a surface protein specific to this bacterium.

### Advantages of PCR for *Staphylococcus aureus* detection

**Sensitivity:** PCR is an incredibly sensitive technique. It can detect even a single DNA molecule, making it ideal for detecting low bacterial loads in clinical samples, such as blood, urine, or wound swabs.

**Specificity:** PCR allows for highly specific detection of *Staphylococcus aureus*. By targeting unique genes, false positives are minimized, ensuring accurate results.

**Speed:** PCR provides rapid results, typically within a few hours, making it invaluable in clinical settings where timely diagnosis and treatment are critical.

**Multiplexing:** Researchers can design multiplex PCR assays to detect multiple targets simultaneously, enabling the identification of different *Staphylococcus aureus* strains or antibiotic resistance genes.

**Quantification:** Quantitative PCR (qPCR) takes PCR a step further, allowing for the quantification of bacterial load in a sample, which is especially useful in monitoring the progression of an infection.

### Applications of PCR in *Staphylococcus aureus* detection

**Clinical diagnostics:** PCR is routinely used in clinical laboratories to diagnose *Staphylococcus aureus* infections. It is especially useful for identifying MRSA strains and determining their antibiotic susceptibility profiles.

**Food safety:** *Staphylococcus aureus* can contaminate food products, leading to foodborne illnesses. PCR is used to detect the presence of this bacterium in food samples, helping to prevent outbreaks.

**Environmental monitoring:** PCR can be employed to monitor *Staphylococcus aureus* in various environmental settings, such as hospitals and food processing facilities, to ensure proper hygiene and infection control.

**Research:** In the field of microbiology and molecular biology, PCR is used to study the genetics and epidemiology of *Staphylococcus aureus*. This research contributes to our understanding of the bacterium's evolution and pathogenicity.

### Challenges in PCR detection

While PCR is a highly effective technique, it is not without its challenges, particularly in the context of *Staphylococcus aureus* detection:

**False negatives:** PCR may produce false-negative results if the target DNA is present in low concentrations or if the primers do not match the genetic diversity of all *Staphylococcus aureus* strains.

**Contamination:** Contamination of PCR reactions with even small amounts of *Staphylococcus aureus* DNA can lead to false-positive results, emphasizing the importance of stringent laboratory practices.

**Antibiotic resistance genes:** Identifying antibiotic resistance genes using PCR can be complicated due to the presence of various resistance mechanisms and genetic variations among strains.

### Future directions in *Staphylococcus aureus* detection

PCR has been a game changer in the detection of *Staphylococcus aureus*, but ongoing research is advancing the field even further. Here are some future directions in *Staphylococcus aureus* detection:

**Next Generation Sequencing (NGS):** NGS technologies allow for the sequencing of entire *Staphylococcus aureus* genomes, providing a comprehensive view of genetic diversity and the presence of antibiotic resistance genes.

**Rapid molecular tests:** Point of care molecular tests are being developed to provide quick and reliable detection of *Staphylococcus aureus* in clinical settings, reducing the time needed for diagnosis and treatment.

**CRISPR based detection:** The revolutionary CRISPR-Cas technology is being harnessed for the development of highly specific and sensitive detection methods, including the detection of *Staphylococcus aureus*.

**Metagenomics:** Meta genomic sequencing can identify the presence of *Staphylococcus aureus* in complex microbial communities, aiding in the study of its interactions in various environments.

### CONCLUSION

The detection of *Staphylococcus aureus* is a critical component of managing infections caused by this versatile pathogen. PCR has revolutionized the field by offering rapid, sensitive, and specific detection methods, with numerous applications in clinical diagnostics, food safety and research. However, challenges remain, such as the potential for false results and the need to adapt to evolving antibiotic resistance mechanisms.