Alert as new killer bug hits families

By Jennifer Jones

HUNDREDS of people across Scotland have contracted a new strain of a potentially lethal superbug.

Families are most at risk, one expert has warned.

GPs have been put on high alert for cases of the flesh-eating strain of MRSA.

Unlike the form found in hospitals, community-acquired MRSA produces a flesh-eating poison that attacks the lungs, killing within hours.

The toxin also destroys infection-fighting white blood cells, putting healthy young people and children at risk.

It is believed to be much deadlier than the hospital version and has already swept through the US.

Dr Alistair Leonard, director of the Scottish Infection Research Network, said: 'We are seeing an increase in the number of cases of people pre-

senting with the community-acquired strain of the MRSA superbug.'

Dr Giles Edwards, director of the Scottish MRSA Reference Laboratory, said: 'In 2004, almost one per cent of MRSA samples sent to the laboratory for analysis were a type of community-acquired MRSA.

In 2007, this figure stood at 2.2 per cent.'

Dr Leonard said the superbug was particularly prevalent in families. He added: 'It enters the bloodstream through cuts and grazes and thrives in homes, nurseries and classrooms. If one family member presents with the superbug, it is very likely they will infect other family members because they often share towels and sheets.'

He said the symptoms of community-acquired MRSA ranged from boils to fatal blood poisoning, adding: 'The best prevention is to wash towels and sheets regularly.'