

MRSA

What is MRSA?

Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) is a type of *Staphylococcus aureus* (“staph”) bacteria. “Staph” is a common type of bacteria that may be frequently found on healthy persons’ skin and in their noses. It can also grow in sores or other sites in the body, sometimes causing an illness. Many people carry staph bacteria on their skin without any symptoms.

Penicillin is an antibiotic that was once commonly used to treat staph infections. Many staph bacteria are no longer killed by penicillin and antibiotics related to penicillin. These new or resistant forms of *Staphylococcus aureus* cause MRSA infections, and they require special medications because some antibiotic medications will not kill the bacteria. The illnesses they cause are the same as those caused by other staph. The difference is in how they are treated.

What are the symptoms of MRSA infection?

Frequently a MRSA infection looks like a pimple, rash, boil or an open wound. Sometimes people think it is a spider bite. The skin infection caused by MRSA can have redness, warmth, swelling, pus and/or pain. If not treated properly, MRSA skin infection may progress quickly from a soreness of the skin to an abscess or other serious body infection.

How is MRSA spread?

MRSA lives on skin and can live on objects for 24 hours or more. Drainage or pus from skin lesions can spread MRSA bacteria to other parts of a person’s body or to other persons. MRSA can rub off the skin of an infected person onto the skin of the other person during body contact. MRSA can also come off the infected skin of a person onto a shared object or surface and get onto the skin of the next person who uses it. Examples of shared objects include razors, towels, clothing and sporting equipment.

How long are people contagious?

Persons can spread MRSA as long as they are carrying it.

Who gets MRSA?

Anyone can get MRSA. Just like normal staph bacteria, MRSA normally does not cause disease unless it enters an opening in the skin. Some people are at a greater risk for carrying MRSA or becoming infected with this type of “staph.” It occurs more frequently in people in hospitals and health care facilities. However, it can also happen outside the hospital in people who either receive multiple antibiotics or come in frequent contact with the germ. This may occur when they have close contact with a person carrying the bacteria or by touching objects “dirtied” or contaminated with MRSA (e.g., clothes, towels, bedding, sporting equipment, benches in saunas or hot tubs, bandages). Crowded living conditions (e.g., schools, jails) and poor hygiene can contribute to the spread of MRSA infections.

What treatment is available for people with MRSA?

Early treatment can help prevent the infection from getting worse. If you have a bad abscess, the doctor should drain the pus. If you are given medicine, be sure to take all of your pills. Be sure to follow directions from your health care provider, even when you start to feel better.

Do infected people need to be kept home from school, work or daycare?

No. Persons with MRSA skin infections should keep the infected area covered with clean, dry pads. They may need to avoid certain activities such as gym class to prevent the covering from coming off.

How can I protect myself and my family from getting MRSA?

- Wash hands frequently with water and soap. (Sanitizing gel may be substituted when hands are not visibly soiled.)
- Keep cuts and scrapes clean with soap and water.
- Do not pick, touch, or scratch your skin infections or touch someone else’s sores.
- Avoid skin contact and sharing personal items with anyone you think could have an MRSA skin infection.
- Don’t insist on antibiotics for colds or other viruses.
- If prescribed antibiotics, take all the pills, even if you feel better before they are all gone.