

# Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus Aureus* (MRSA)



## What is *Staphylococcus aureus* (staph)?

*Staphylococcus aureus* (or *S. aureus*), also called “staph,” are bacteria commonly found on the skin or in the nose of healthy people. When bacteria are found on the skin but do not make a person sick, it is called “colonization.” Approximately 25% to 30% of all people are colonized in the nose with staph bacteria. When the bacteria make a person sick, they are “infected” with staph. In most cases, staph does not cause any problems or it causes minor infections, such as pimples or boils. Staph skin infections are sometimes mistaken for spider bites. In some cases, staph can cause more serious infections, such as surgical wound infections, bloodstream infections, and pneumonia.

## What is MRSA?

Methicillin-resistant *S. aureus* (MRSA) is a type of staph resistant to the antibiotic methicillin and related antibiotics. Other antibiotics can be used to treat MRSA, but treatment may be more difficult and/or more expensive.

It used to be that most MRSA infections occurred among patients in hospitals or other healthcare settings; however, MRSA is becoming more common in the community.

## How does MRSA spread?

Staph infections including MRSA are spread by close contact with infected people. Staph can come off of infected skin onto the skin of another person during skin-to-skin contact. Wound drainage is very infectious.

Staph can also come off of infected skin onto shared objects and surfaces and can get onto the skin of the person who uses the object or surface next. Examples include: towels, wound dressings, bandages, sheets, clothes, athletic equipment, and benches in saunas or hot tubs. In other words, anything that could have touched the skin of a staph-infected person can carry the bacteria to the skin of another person.

## Are some people more at risk?

MRSA infections are more common among persons who have the following risks:

- Chronic skin diseases or open wounds
- Long-term illness or long-term dialysis
- Injection drug use
- Been a patient in the hospital or other health care facility within the past year
- Contact with other persons with MRSA infection
- Lots of antibiotic use
- Live in crowded settings
- Poor personal hygiene
- Lots of skin-to-skin contact
- Contact with contaminated surfaces or shared items

As examples, MRSA infections have recently been reported among the prison population, players of contact sports, men who have sex with men, military recruits, children, and others.

MRSA can also cause illness in healthy people who have not been patients in hospitals and do not appear to have any risk factors.

## How is MRSA diagnosed & treated?

If you think you have a staph infection, see your healthcare provider. Early treatment can help prevent the infection from getting worse.

The health care provider will test the wound and send a sample to the laboratory. Tests are done to determine which antibiotics will effectively treat the infection.

Most MRSA infections can be treated with proper wound and skin care and/or by using the right antibiotics. If you are given an antibiotic, take all of the doses, even if the infection is getting better. Don't stop the antibiotics unless your doctor tells you to. If you do, the infection may come back, and may be harder to treat.

After visiting your healthcare provider, the infection should start getting better. If it is not getting better after a few days, contact your provider.

People who are colonized *but not infected* with MRSA do not usually need to be treated.

## How can I protect myself from getting infected with staph or MRSA skin infections?

- Practice good hygiene. Keep hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and water. Cover all surfaces of the hands with soap and rub hands together for at least 20 seconds. Dry your hands with disposable paper towels or hand dryers (e.g., avoid sharing towels). If soap and water are unavailable, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Keep cuts and abrasions clean and covered with a clean bandage until healed.
- Avoid contact with other people's wounds, bandages, and material and surfaces contaminated from wounds.
- Avoid sharing personal items such as towels, washcloths, razors, clothing, and uniforms.
- Avoid skin-to-skin contact with persons who have skin infections.
- Clean objects and surfaces that are shared with other persons, such as athletic equipment, before you use them.
- Do not share antibiotics with other people or save unfinished antibiotics to use at another time. Never take antibiotics to treat viral illnesses like colds or the flu. Antibiotics have no effect against viruses and taking unnecessary antibiotics may increase your risk of developing an antibiotic-resistant infection such as MRSA.

## If I have a staph or MRSA skin infection, what can I do to prevent others from getting infected?

You can prevent spreading staph or MRSA skin infections to others by following these steps:

- Keep wounds that are draining or have pus covered with clean, dry bandages. Pus from infected wounds can contain staph and MRSA, so keeping the infection covered will help prevent the spread to others.
- Follow your healthcare provider's instructions on proper care of the wound.
- Bandages or tape can be thrown away with the regular trash. Put bandages in a separate trash bag and close the bag tightly before putting it with the regular garbage.

- You and everyone else in close contact with you should wash their hands frequently with soap and warm water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, especially after changing the bandage or touching the infected wound.
- Caregivers should use gloves and wash their hands after changing the bandage, touching the infected wound, or handling items that have contacted the wound.
- Do not share personal items (e.g., towels, washcloths, razors, clothing, or uniforms) or other items that may have had contact with the infected wound or wound drainage.
- Disinfect all non-clothing (non-disposable) items that come in contact with the wound with a solution of one tablespoon household bleach mixed in one quart of water (must be prepared fresh each day) or use an over the counter disinfectant if the product label states it is effective against *S. aureus*.
- Wash sheets, towels, and clothes that become soiled with hot water and laundry detergent. Drying clothes in a hot dryer, rather than air-drying, also helps kill bacteria in clothes.
- Wash utensils and dishes in the usual manner with soap and hot water or using a standard home dishwasher.
- Avoid participating in contact sports or other skin-to-skin contact until your infection has healed.
- If you have a MRSA infection, be sure to tell any health care providers who treat you that you have this infection.
- If other people you know or live with get the same infection tell them to go to their healthcare provider.

## What should I do if someone I know has a staph or MRSA infection?

If you know someone who has a staph or MRSA infection, you should follow the prevention steps noted above.

### References:

[www.cdc.gov/ncidod/hip/ARESIST/ca\\_mrsa\\_public.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/hip/ARESIST/ca_mrsa_public.htm)

Public Health, Seattle & King County Fact Sheet for Patients and the Public, Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA)

LA County Department of Health Services Guidelines for Reducing the Spread of Staph/CA-MRSA in Non-Healthcare Settings v. 1

Oregon AWARE, Alliance Working for Antibiotic Resistance Education