

MRSA Fact Sheet

What is MRSA?

MRSA is a kind of *Staphylococcus aureus* (“staph”) bacterium that is resistant to beta-lactam antibiotics, including methicillin, oxacillin, penicillin, and amoxicillin. It is often resistant to many other antibiotics as well. Infections with MRSA are generally treatable.

How is MRSA spread?

Staph, including MRSA, are spread by direct skin-to-skin contact, such as shaking hands, or other direct contact with the skin of another person. Staph are also spread by contact with items that have been touched by people with staph, like towels shared after bathing and drying off, or shared athletic equipment in the gym or on the field.

Most people who have staph or MRSA on their skin do not have infection or illness caused by staph. These people are “colonized” with staph. Staph infections start when staph get into a cut, scrape or other break in the skin.

What are the symptoms of an infection caused by MRSA?

MRSA is a type of staph, so the symptoms of a MRSA infection and the symptoms of an infection due to other staph are often the same. Pimples, rashes, pus-filled boils, especially when warm, painful, red or swollen, can indicate a staph skin infection. Impetigo is one example of a skin infection that can be caused by staph, including MRSA.

In severe cases, MRSA can spread to the blood. Major complications from MRSA generally result from spread to the blood. Treatment when the infection is just on the skin prevents MRSA from spreading to the blood.

How are MRSA infections treated?

Most MRSA infections are treated by good wound and skin care: keeping the area clean and dry, washing hands after caring for the area, carefully disposing of any bandages, and allowing the body to heal. Sometimes treatment requires the use of antibiotics. If antibiotics are needed, it is important for the patient to use the medication as directed unless the healthcare provider says to stop.

Does someone with MRSA need to stay home?

Generally, no. As long as someone is receiving treatment and is able to keep the infected area covered, this is usually not needed. It’s best to discuss this question with your doctor.

How can I prevent MRSA infections?

The Health Department recommends:

- Regular handwashing to prevent getting and spreading staph/MRSA.
- Encourage and practice hand hygiene (see attached Prevention Wednesday “Reducing Infections in Schools and Child Care” **TIP 1**).
- Practice and encourage good skin care. Since staph infections start when staph enter the body through a break in the skin, keeping skin healthy and intact is an important preventative measure.
- Ensure access to sinks, soaps, and clean towels.
- Ensure the availability of alcohol-based hand sanitizers, if soap and water are not accessible.
- Encourage daily showers with soap and water.
- Discourage sharing of personal items such as towels, razors, and toothbrushes.
- Regularly clean sinks, showers, and toilets by saturating with disinfectant.
- Disinfect athletic equipment between users.
- Launder sheets, towels, sports uniforms, and underclothing with hot water and detergent, and dry on the hottest setting.
- Wear gloves when caring for another person’s wounds, and protect clothing from touching wounds or bandages.
- Encourage those infected to always keep draining lesions covered with dressings.
- Dispose of dressings containing pus and blood carefully.

References:

Centers for Disease Control:

Overview of Community-Associated MRSA
http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_mrsa_ca.html

Overview of Healthcare-Associated MRSA
http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_mrsa.html

State of Massachusetts, Questions and Answers for about MRSA for School health Professionals:
http://www.mass.gov/dph/cdc/antibiotic/mrsa_school_health.htm

Baltimore City Department of Health:
<http://www.baltimorehealth.org/mrsa.html>