

# SCOTT COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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## **Methicillin Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA)**

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The Scott and Rock Island counties medical societies and health departments have taken calls recently about methicillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, or MRSA. As the public hears about cases, people want to know what MRSA is, how it is spread and how to prevent it.

MRSA is a type of the very common staph bacteria (30% of people have staph in their noses or on their skin and at least 1% have the MRSA strain at any time without being sick or having any symptoms). This type of staph is not killed by penicillin-related antibiotics, which makes treating serious infections harder. The number of MRSA cases has been growing for many years because of the use and overuse of antibiotics.

Serious (also called ***invasive***) MRSA infections are seen in ***hospital and healthcare*** settings. These infections can involve the lungs, blood, heart and other internal body parts. Much less serious skin and soft tissue infections are being seen in the community more now than they have before.

MRSA is spread from person-to-person by ***direct contact*** with the infected area. This means ***skin touching skin***. People who wash their hands often, cover open or infected sores, and practice good personal hygiene (covering your mouth when you cough, for example) will not spread the bug or pick it up if they do not already have it in their body. These things are common courtesy and will stop the spread of many other diseases that are just as or more important. Influenza is an important example.

Here are some preventative measures you can take:

- Soap and water hand washing is a very good way to prevent the spread of MRSA.
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizers work, too. The nice thing about them is they can be kept in a purse or a bag and used when soap and water is not available.
- Do NOT share personal items such as razors, towels, washcloths, sports equipment, etc.
- Surfaces such as tables, counters, showers, etc are not why MRSA is spread from person to person, but it is a good idea to clean them.
- Clean surfaces that may have touched any kind of infection with an everyday detergent-based cleaner.
- In sports settings, clean equipment and surfaces that may have been in contact with infections after every use with an everyday detergent-based cleaner.
- Clothes and bedding that have touched the infection can be washed with detergent and dried in a dryer.

Skin infections and pimples, boils, etc. are very common, and can be infected with MRSA. They do not become serious very often if they are found and treated correctly. These infections often get better with soap and water cleaning and by putting antiseptics creams on them, and they may

not even need or get better from antibiotics. **They do not require staying out of work or school.** as long as the infection is covered. The chance of spreading to other people is low when they are kept covered.

In athletic settings, not letting anyone with any skin or soft tissue infection play until the infection is healed is sensible. You should not think of MRSA as being different from other infections that can be found in sports. There are many other bacteria and viruses that cause infections that are just as serious and contagious as MRSA.

A final word on antibiotics: We find ourselves trying to treat many different antibiotic resistant bacteria these days. Bacteria change with antibiotic use and misuse in many settings from the farm, to the community, to the hospital. You can help by understanding that most common illnesses such as colds, the flu, etc, are caused by viruses and will not get better faster with antibiotics. Many that are caused by bacteria go away just as well without using antibiotics. If your healthcare provider wants you or your child to take an antibiotic, be sure he or she makes a good case they are needed to make you better faster. If you really need an antibiotic take all that is prescribed in the way it is prescribed.