

FACT SHEET

Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA)

What is *Staphylococcus aureus*?

Germs called *Staphylococcus aureus* are bacteria. They are often just called “staph.” Many healthy people carry staph in their noses or on their skin. Sometimes staph bacteria can cause infections. Usually these infections are skin infections like pimples and boils. Sometimes they are more serious infections like lung or blood infections.

What is Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA)?

MRSA is a type of staph that has changed (become resistant) due to overuse and abuse of antibiotics. Antibiotics are drugs that kill bacteria. This resistant staph can't be killed by the usual antibiotics, like penicillin.

What is Community-Associated MRSA (CA-MRSA)?

In the past, most infections caused by MRSA were in hospitals or nursing homes. Now, healthy people who have not recently been in the hospital are getting infections caused by MRSA. These are called community-associated MRSA infections. Community-associated MRSA infections are usually skin infections, like pimples or boils. These infections may need to be treated with carefully chosen antibiotics. It is also possible for CA-MRSA to cause blood, bone, and lung infections.

Who is at risk for MRSA infections?

MRSA infections are most common in hospitals and nursing homes. Conditions that help MRSA spread are skin touching skin, cuts or scrapes, and crowded living conditions. If a person not in the hospital has a MRSA infection, it is more likely to spread if this person is a member of certain groups. These groups include athletes, military recruits, children, prisoners, and men who have sex with men.

How is MRSA spread?

The bacteria enter the body through open cuts and scrapes on the skin. The bacteria usually spread when a person with MRSA on their skin comes into contact with another person's skin. Hand washing and keeping wounds covered is important in stopping a possible spread of the infection. A far less common way to spread MRSA is to share towels and sports equipment.

What does a MRSA infection look like?

MRSA may cause a skin infection that looks like a pimple or boil. The infection often looks like a spider bite. It can be red, swollen, and painful. It may drain pus. If you think you may have a skin infection, see your healthcare provider. Lab tests may be run to see if your infection is caused by MRSA.

If I or someone I know has a MRSA infection, how can I keep it from spreading?

- Keep wounds that are draining covered with clean, dry, bandages.
- Clean hands regularly with soap and water or alcohol-based hand gel (if hands are not visibly soiled). Always clean hands immediately after touching infected skin or any item that has come in direct contact with a draining wound.
- Maintain good general hygiene with regular bathing.
- Do not share items that may become contaminated with wound drainage, such as towels, clothing, bedding, bar soap, razors, and athletic equipment that touches the skin.
- Wash clothing that has come in contact with wound drainage after each use and dry thoroughly.
- If you are not able to keep your wound covered with a clean, dry bandage at all times, do not join in activities where you have skin to skin contact with other persons (such as sports or in child care centers) until your wound is healed.
- Clean equipment and other environmental surfaces with which multiple individuals have bare skin contact with an over the counter detergent/disinfectant that specifies *Staphylococcus aureus* on the product label and is suitable for the type of surface being cleaned.

How is MRSA treated?

Your healthcare provider will decide the best way to treat your infection. Some infections may need to be drained. Only a healthcare provider should drain sores. Some infections may need antibiotics. Tell your healthcare provider if you are not getting better in a few days. You may need to go to the hospital to receive antibiotics directly into your veins. Be sure to tell any healthcare provider you see if you have had an MRSA infection in the past. If anyone you know gets a similar skin infection, have them see their healthcare provider.

Please see the "**Antibiotic Resistance Fact Sheet**" for more information.