

MRSA

MRSA refers to methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*.

MRSA is a type of *Staphylococcus*, or 'staph,' bacterium that has developed resistance to the antibiotics usually used to treat the infection, including methicillin and other penicillins.

Staph bacteria are commonly carried on the skin or in the nose of healthy people.

What is a MRSA skin infection?

Most people have heard of the *Staphylococcus aureus* bacteria. Also known as 'staph,' this bacteria is one of the most common causes of skin infections. Most staph infections are minor, such as impetigo, cellulitis and small abscesses or boils.

While regular staph infections are usually easily treated with cephalosporin antibiotics, the MRSA bacteria has developed a resistance to these antibiotics, so that they don't work anymore.

How do MRSA skin infections spread?

The cleanest person can get a MRSA infection. The MRSA bacteria can rub off the skin of an infected person onto the skin of another person during skin to skin contact. Or, the bacteria can come off of 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 commonly shared objects include towels, soap, benches in hot tubs, and athletic equipment—in other words, anything that could have touched the skin of an infected person can carry the bacteria to the skin of another person.

Does everyone who is exposed to MRSA become infected?

No. Some people become "colonized," which means that the bacteria are present, growing and multiplying without observable signs of disease. Colonization can occur on the skin and surface, in the nasal passage, or in the urine. Colonization can lead to infection in persons who have weakened immune systems.

Other individuals can be exposed to MRSA and never become ill or colonized.

How long can an infected person carry MRSA?

Some people can carry MRSA for days to many months, even after their infection has been treated.

What are the symptoms of MRSA infection?

MRSA infections can cause a range of symptoms based on the part of the body that is infected. Swelling, and tenderness can occur at the site of infection. It may appear as a boil or infected area with pus.

How are MRSA infections diagnosed?

MRSA is diagnosed when a sample of the infected wound is taken to grow the bacteria in the laboratory. Once the bacteria have grown, the laboratory will conduct tests to see which antibiotics will be effective for treating the infection.

Questions?

**Call the
Disease Surveillance Program**

269-373-5267

What is the treatment for MRSA?

There are antibiotics available that are effective in treating a MRSA infection. Laboratory tests are generally done to determine which antibiotic should be given. It is important to take all of the doses of antibiotic, even if the infection is getting better. Do not share antibiotics with others, or save unfinished antibiotics to use at another time.

Are there complications from MRSA?

MRSA can be difficult to treat and it is possible, though rare, for the infection to progress to life-threatening blood or bone infections or pneumonia.

How can I prevent myself or my family members from getting infected?

Keep cuts and scrapes clean with soap and water. Avoid skin contact and sharing personal items with anyone you suspect could have a MRSA skin infection. Clean objects that you share with other persons, such as athletic equipment, before you use it. Always wash clothes and towels that might be carrying MRSA.

What should I do if I think I have a skin infection?

If you think you have a skin infection, contact your doctor or healthcare provider. Early treatment can help prevent the infection from getting worse. If you are prescribed antibiotics, be sure to take all of your pills. Be sure to follow directions from your healthcare provider closely, even when you start to feel better.

If my doctor or healthcare provider has told me that I have a MRSA skin infection, what can I do to keep others from getting infected?

Keep the infected area covered with clean, dry bandages. Pus from an infected wound can infect others.

While the wound is draining, shower twice a day with a Dial or Safeguard anti-bacterial soap. It is especially important to keep the wound dry and covered while draining.

Do not shave your body. Shaving can cause the bacteria to spread.

You and your close contacts should wash hands frequently with soap and warm water, especially after changing your bandages or touching infected skin.

Regularly clean and disinfect surfaces and personal items in your home.

Do not share personal items such as towels, razors, or clothing that may have had contact with the infected wound.

Wash all towels, sheets, and clothing with hot water and detergent. Drying items in a hot dryer, rather than air-drying, will help kill the bacteria.

Tell any healthcare providers who treat you that you have a MRSA skin infection.

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