

Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA) Fact Sheet

What is MRSA?

Staph bacteria are one of the most common causes of skin infections in the United States. Most of these skin infections are minor and can be treated without antibiotics. MRSA staph bacteria are resistant to methicillin and other more common antibiotics used to treat staph infections making it an important public health concern.

What are the symptoms?

Staph bacteria, including MRSA, can cause skin infections that may look like a pimple, boil, or abscess. Infected skin may be red, swollen, painful, or have pus or other drainage. A fever may be present. More serious staph infections occasionally result in pneumonia, bloodstream infections, or wound infections.

How is it spread?

MRSA usually spreads from person-to-person through hands, skin-to-skin contact. Drainage from an infected wound can spread MRSA to other parts of the body or to other persons. MRSA can survive on some surfaces for prolonged periods of time. Risk factors associated with the spread of MRSA skin infections include: skin-to-skin contact, openings in the skin such as cuts or abrasions, contaminated items and surfaces, crowded living conditions, and poor hygiene.

How is it treated?

- Antibiotics are not always needed; often draining the wound by a healthcare provider may be the only treatment.
- The wound should be cleaned frequently and kept covered with a bandage to prevent spreading the infection.
- When necessary, antibiotics may be prescribed to treat MRSA infections. A healthcare provider may need to do a laboratory test to determine which antibiotic will work the best.
- It is very important to take antibiotics as prescribed and not save them or share them with other persons.

How is it prevented?

- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol, especially after touching wounds or bandages.
- Do not share personal items like towels, wash cloths, razors, or clothing--even among family members.
- Persons with MRSA should not participate in contact sports or swimming until the wounds have healed completely and they have clearance from their health care provider.
- Seek medical care immediately at the first sign of infection (red, swollen, painful, draining pus).
- Keep wounds clean and cover with a dry bandage, especially if the wound is draining.
- Avoid contact with the wounds and bandages of another person.
- Throw away soiled bandages.
- Follow your health care provider's instructions on proper wound care.
- Wash clothes, towels, and sheets using laundry detergent with the water temperature set at the hottest setting. Bleach may be added if desired after checking the label instructions.
- Dry in a dryer at the hottest suitable temperature. Do not line dry.

Cleaning:

Cleaning and disinfect high-tough or soiled surfaces frequently (for example door knobs and phones). Shared sports equipment should be cleaned between uses. Useful cleaning/disinfecting products include:

- Soap and water
- A bleach solution of 1/4 cup of 5.25% household chlorine bleach to 1 gallon of water made fresh daily
- Lysol or original Pine-Sol

Follow label instructions for appropriate dilutions and contact time to be sure that surfaces are cleaned properly.

Should a student with MRSA be restricted from school activities?

In most instances, a person known to be infected with MRSA does not need to be restricted from school or activities. If the infected person is unable to keep wound drainage well-contained, and/or has poor personal hygiene, they may be restricted.