

# Fact Sheet: Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA)

## 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 (such as pimples and boils) and can be treated without antibiotics. Some staph bacteria are resistant to antibiotics. MRSA is a type of staph that is resistant to methicillin and other more common antibiotics such as oxacillin, penicillin, and amoxicillin. Most MRSA infections occur among patients in hospitals or other health care settings; however, it is becoming more common in the community setting.

## 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 or 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 to treat MRSA skin infections. Often opening and draining of the wound by a healthcare provider may be the only treatment needed.
- 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?

### Personal Hygiene:

- 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, bar soap, 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.

### Wound care:

- Seek medical care immediately at the first signs 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.

### Laundry:

- 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:

Clean and disinfect high-touch 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
- 1:100 bleach solution (1/4 cup of 5.25% household chlorine bleach to 1 gallon of water). The bleach solution should be made up fresh every day.
- Lysol
- Original Pine-Sol

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

*This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information call your health care provider or call Washtenaw County Public Health at 734-544-6700.*

