



NAVY ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH CENTER

Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA)

Public Health Fact Sheet

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What is *Staphylococcus aureus*?

Staphylococcus aureus is a type of bacteria, commonly referred to simply as "staph." It is found on the skin or in the nose of healthy people. Sometimes, staph can cause an infection and illness. 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. However, staph bacteria can also cause serious infections (such as surgical wound infections, bloodstream infections, and pneumonia).

What is MRSA?

MRSA (methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*) is a form of staph infection where the bacteria have become resistant to some types of antibiotics. These antibiotics include methicillin and other more common antibiotics such as, penicillin, amoxicillin and oxacillin.

Who gets these infections?

Serious staph infections, including MRSA, occur most frequently among persons in hospitals and healthcare facilities (such as nursing homes and dialysis centers) who have weakened immune systems. Staph and MRSA can also cause illness in persons outside of hospitals and healthcare facilities, especially in close-contact environments. Non-healthcare cases of MRSA infections have been seen in a variety of different groups including prison inmates, athletes, military members, recruit training and children at daycare centers.

Since 2001, the Navy and Marine Corps have reported MRSA outbreaks on surface ships, submarines and aircraft carriers. Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, the Basic Underwater Demolition School and the Naval Aviation Training Center have also experienced outbreaks.

What do these infections look like?

Staph bacteria, including MRSA, can cause skin infections that may look like a pimple or boil and can be red, swollen, painful, or have pus or other drainage. They can occur in otherwise healthy people. People often complain of a sore that they think started as a spider or insect bite. More serious infections include pneumonia, bloodstream or surgical wound infections.

What is the treatment?

Most staph and MRSA infections are treatable with antibiotics. Always seek medical attention if you develop a boil, red or inflamed skin, or have a sore that does not go away or that does not respond to antibiotics.

How can I prevent MRSA infections?

MRSA infections can be prevented by following good personal hygiene practices:

1. Keep your hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer throughout the day.
2. Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healed.
3. Never touch other people's wounds or bandages.
4. Avoid sharing personal items such as towels, razors or other toiletries.
5. Maintain excellent personal hygiene through regular showers and by keeping your living space clean, including regular laundering of bed linens.
6. Clean off recreational equipment, such as weight benches before use or use a clean barrier such as a towel or shirt between your bare skin and the exercise equipment.



Strict and consistent personal hygiene is the best prevention

Can people have MRSA without symptoms?

Yes, healthy people frequently carry staph bacteria, including MRSA, on their skin. These individuals are “colonized” with the bacteria and are known as carriers. The organism is present in or on the body but does not cause illness and generally causes no harm. Carriers are at low risk of getting illness due to MRSA despite having MRSA colonized on their skin.

Can MRSA be spread from person to person?

MRSA is usually spread by direct contact with an infected or colonized person. It may also be spread through contaminated objects or surfaces.

If I have a MRSA skin infection, what should I do to prevent other people from getting it from me?

Your healthcare provider will discuss ways to prevent spreading MRSA to other people. However, the general recommendations are to:

1. Keep your infected wound covered.
2. Wash your hands frequently with soap and warm water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer
3. Do not share personal items.



The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has additional information on MRSA infections which can be found at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/hip/ARESIST/mrsa.htm>

If you have additional questions or think you would like more information, contact:

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