

STAPH Infection: What is MRSA?

What is a STAPH infection?

Staphylococcus aureus, often referred to as "staph," are bacteria commonly carried on the skin or in the nose of healthy people. 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 also can cause serious infections such as surgical wound infections, bloodstream infections, and pneumonia.

Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) is a type of bacteria that is resistant to certain antibiotics. These antibiotics include methicillin and other more common antibiotics such as oxacillin, penicillin and amoxicillin. 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.

MRSA infections that occur in otherwise healthy people who have not hospitalized within the past year or had a medical procedure (such as dialysis, surgery, catheters) are known as community-associated (CA)-MRSA infections. These infections are usually skin infections, such as abscesses, boils, and other pus-filled lesions.

How is STAPH and MRSA spread?

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), factors that have been associated with the spread of staph and MRSA skin infections include close skin-to-skin contact, openings in the skin such as cuts or abrasions, contaminated items and surfaces, crowded living conditions, and poor hygiene.

How can I protect myself and others from becoming infected?

Practice good hygiene to prevent the spread of staph and MRSA infections:

1. Clean your hands. You, your family, and others in close contact should wash their hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and warm water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, especially after touching an infected wound or changing bandages.
2. Cover wounds. Keep wounds that are draining or have pus covered with clean, dry bandages until healed. Follow your healthcare provider's instructions on proper care of wounds. Pus from infected wounds can contain staph and MRSA, so keeping the infection covered will help prevent the spread to others. Bandages or tape can be discarded with the regular trash.
3. Do not share personal items or athletic equipment. Avoid sharing personal items such as towels, washcloths, razors, clothing, uniforms and athletic equipment that may have had contact with infected wounds or bandages. Wash sheets, towels, and clothes that become soiled with water and laundry detergent and dry clothes on the hottest setting. Surfaces and equipment should be cleaned with disinfectant wipes or a bleach solution.
4. Talk to your doctor. Tell any healthcare providers who treat you that you have or had a staph or MRSA skin infection.

What should I do if I suspect a STAPH infection?

See your physician for an evaluation. Your physician can perform lab tests to determine if the infection is being caused by staph or MRSA. Your physician can provide appropriate treatment.

For more information, please visit www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_mrsa_ca.html.