

## Community Associated MRSA Fact Sheet

### **What is *Staphylococcus aureus* (staph)?**

*Staphylococcus aureus*, often referred to simply as "staph," are bacteria commonly carried on the skin or in the nose of healthy people. Approximately 25% to 30% of people carry this bacterium in their nose without it causing an infection. Sometimes, staph can cause an infection. Staph bacteria are one of the most common causes of skin infections. Most of these skin infections are minor and can be treated without antibiotics. However, staph bacteria also can cause serious infections (such as surgical wound infections, bloodstream infections, and pneumonia).

### **What is MRSA (methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*)?**

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MRSA is a type of staph bacteria that is resistant to certain types of antibiotics including methicillin, oxacillin, amoxicillin, and penicillin. Approximately 1% of people carry this resistant bacterium.

Staph and MRSA can also cause illness in persons outside of hospitals and healthcare facilities. MRSA infections that are acquired by persons who **have not** been recently (within the past year) hospitalized nor had a medical procedure are known as CA-MRSA (community-associated MRSA) infections. Staph or MRSA infections in the community are usually manifested as skin infections, such as pimples and boils, and occur in otherwise healthy people.

### **Who gets staph or MRSA infections?**

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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.

Factors that have been associated with the spread of 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.

### **What does a staph or MRSA infection look like?**

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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.

### **How can I prevent staph or MRSA skin infections?**

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Practice good hygiene:

1. Keep your hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
2. Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healed.
3. Avoid contact with other people's wounds or bandages.
4. Avoid sharing personal items such as towels or razors.

## **Are people who are positive for the human immune deficiency virus (HIV) at increased risk for MRSA? Should they be taking special precautions?**

People with weakened immune systems, which include some patients with HIV infection, may be at risk for more severe illness if they get infected with MRSA. People with HIV should follow the prevention measures listed above.

## **Can I get a staph or MRSA infection at my health club?**

MRSA is transmitted most frequently by direct skin-to-skin contact. You can protect yourself from infections by following the prevention measures listed above and using a barrier (e.g., clothing or a towel) between your skin and shared equipment; and wiping surfaces of equipment before and after use.

## **Are staph and MRSA infections treatable?**

Yes. Most staph and MRSA infections are treatable with antibiotics. If you are given an antibiotic, take all of the doses, even if the infection is getting better, unless your doctor tells you to stop taking it. Do not share antibiotics with other people or save unfinished antibiotics.

Many staph skin infections may be treated by draining the abscess or boil and may not require antibiotics. Drainage of skin boils or abscesses should **only** be done by a healthcare provider.

If after visiting your healthcare provider the infection is not getting better after a few days, contact them again. If other people you know or live with get the same infection tell them to go to their healthcare provider.

## **If I have a staph, or MRSA skin infection, what can I do to prevent others from getting infected?**

You can prevent spreading staph or MRSA skin infections to others by following these steps:

1. **Cover your wound.** Keep wounds that are draining or have pus covered with clean, dry bandages. Follow your healthcare provider's instructions on proper care of the wound. Pus from infected wounds can contain staph and MRSA, so keeping the infection covered will help prevent the spread to others.
2. **Clean your hands.** You, your family, and others in close contact should wash their hands frequently with soap and warm water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, especially after changing the bandage or touching the infected wound.
3. **Do not share personal items.** Avoid sharing personal items such as towels, washcloths, razors, clothing, or uniforms that may have had contact with the infected wound or bandage. Wash sheets, towels, and clothes that become soiled with water and laundry detergent. Drying clothes in a hot dryer, rather than air-drying, also helps kill bacteria in clothes.
4. **Talk to your doctor.** Tell any healthcare providers who treat you that you have or had a staph or MRSA skin infection.