

# MRSA\* Fact Sheet

The information below is intended for residents of the United States only and is not meant to make any specific diagnosis or provide treatment advice and should not substitute for the advice provided by a medical professional. Always consult a physician if you have health concerns.

## ■ What is MRSA?

*Staphylococcus aureus* (commonly referred to as “Staph”) is a common germ that is found on the skin and in the nose. Usually, it does no harm. But sometimes it can cause infection, such as a blood or skin infection. MRSA is a type of Staph that is resistant to methicillin—a type of antibiotic related to penicillin that is used to treat infections. Resistance means that this drug no longer works to kill the germ.<sup>1</sup>

## ■ How common are MRSA infections?

The exact number of infections caused by MRSA is unknown, but it is becoming more common in the United States. Many MRSA infections are spread in hospitals or nursing homes.<sup>2</sup>

## ■ How do people get MRSA infections?

MRSA infections can be spread by touch, such as skin-to-skin contact with someone who has the infection, or contact with surfaces that have the germ on them. Crowded living conditions and poor personal cleanliness (like not washing your hands) can also spread MRSA infections.<sup>1</sup>

## ■ How can I avoid getting a MRSA infection?

Keep your hands clean by washing them well with soap and water, or use an alcohol hand gel. Also, keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until they are healed. Avoid contact with other people’s wounds or bandages. Don’t share personal items like towels or razors.<sup>1</sup>

## ■ What could a MRSA skin infection look like?

MRSA can cause skin infections that may look like a pimple or boil that can be red, swollen, and painful. The infection might have pus leaking from it.<sup>1</sup>

\*Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*.



## ■ How will my doctor know if I have a MRSA infection?

If your doctor thinks that you may have a MRSA infection, he or she will do tests. A sample of your blood, urine, or a piece of skin may be sent to a lab for testing. The lab will be able to tell for sure by testing, and your doctor will tell you if it's MRSA.<sup>3</sup>

## ■ Is a MRSA infection serious?

Some skin infections caused by MRSA can be easily treated. But others may get worse; more serious infections, like blood infections, can develop.

## ■ Can a MRSA infection be treated?

Yes. Treatment for a MRSA infection may include having a doctor clean out the infection or taking an antibiotic. If you are given a prescription, be sure to take all of the medicine, even if the sore or wound is getting better. Do not share your drugs with other people or save them to use later.<sup>1</sup>

## ■ If I have a MRSA infection, is it safe for my children or other people to be around me?

While most healthy people are believed to have very little risk of catching a MRSA infection, you should always consult your physician for advice regarding exposure to others.<sup>2,3</sup>

## ■ If I have a MRSA infection, how can I avoid spreading it to other people?

Here are some things you can do to help reduce the risk of exposure to others:

- You and family members should wash your hands often with soap and warm water. You should use an alcohol hand gel when soap and water are not available.
- Keep any cuts and scrapes clean and cover them with bandages. Do not touch other people's cuts or bandages. Washing your hands is really important after changing a bandage or touching a wound.
- Household kitchen items (like knives, forks, and spoons), bedding, and linens should be washed in hot water and detergent.<sup>1</sup>

## References

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site. Have you been diagnosed with a *Staphylococcus aureus* or MRSA infection? Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/pdf/ar/MRSAPatientInfoSheet.pdf>. Accessed March 4, 2008.
2. Naimi TS, LeDell KH, Como-Sabetti K, et al. Comparison of community- and health care-associated methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* infection. *JAMA*. 2003;290:2976-2984.
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