

HEALTH INFORMATION

METHICILLIN-RESISTANT STAPHYLOCOCCUS AUREUS "MRSA"

WHAT IS STAPHYLOCOCCUS AUREUS?

Staphylococcus aureus "Staph" is a bacteria commonly found on the skin or in the nose of healthy people. It is a common bacterium found widely in the environment. Sometimes Staph bacteria cause infections. In the United States, Staph bacteria are the most common cause of skin infections, causing pimples, boils and abscesses. Rarely, Staph can cause more serious infections, leading to pneumonia or blood infections.

WHAT IS METHICILLIN-RESISTANT STAPHYLOCOCCUS AUREUS "MRSA"?

Some staph bacteria have become resistant to common antibiotics, such as penicillin. These more potent bacteria are called "Methicillin-resistant." In the past, these bacteria were found almost exclusively in hospitals. Recently, "MRSA" is being seen more and more in community settings, and is called community-associated MRSA, or CA-MRSA. It is often seen in athletes, probably because of the close contact sports team members have with one another. It is thought that these and other "super bugs" are evolving because of the widespread misuse of antibiotics.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF MRSA?

CA-MRSA usually develops as a skin infection such as a boil or abscess. Often, people describe the initial lesion as a "spider bite." The involved area is swollen and red, painful, and pus may be present. The lesion will often get worse until proper treatment is begun.

HOW IS MRSA TRANSMITTED FROM ONE PERSON TO ANOTHER?

The usual mode of transmission of MRSA is direct skin-to-skin contact between an infected person and another individual, often on contaminated hands. It may rarely be transmitted on environmental surfaces contaminated by the bacteria.

HOW IS A MRSA INFECTION DIAGNOSED AND TREATED?

The physician should take a culture of the infected site. If *Staphylococcus aureus* is identified, the bacteria is tested to see what antibiotic is most effective. Often, the antibiotic Bactrim is prescribed, and in more severe cases, intravenous Vancomycin can be given. When an antibiotic is prescribed, every dose should be taken as ordered. If indicated, the lesion may be drained. The infected area is cleaned with soap and water and covered with a bandage.

HOW CAN I PREVENT MRSA INFECTIONS?

The most important thing that you can do to prevent this infection as well as all other infections is to practice good hygiene. You should wash your hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healing has taken place. Avoid contact with other people's wounds. Do not share personal items such as towels with others. A person infected with MRSA should keep the infected area clean and covered with a dressing. Frequent hand washing is very important. If you suspect a staph infection, see your health care provider as soon as possible.