

DOWELL HEALTH CENTER

STAPH AND MRSA SKIN INFECTIONS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is MRSA?

Staphylococcus aureus or Staph is a type of bacteria. It may cause skin infections that look like pimples or boils. Skin infections caused by Staph may be red, swollen, painful, or have pus or other drainage. Some Staph are resistant to certain antibiotics, making it harder to treat. This Staph is also known as Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* or MRSA (pronounced “mersa”).

Until the 1990’s MRSA was a problem mainly in hospitals and nursing home patients. Over the past 10 years MRSA has become more common in healthy people living in the community. It is thought that overuse of antibiotics has contributed to this increase.

Who gets MRSA?

Anyone can get a MRSA infection. MRSA can be spread among people having close contact with infected people. **MRSA is almost always spread by direct physical contact and not through the air.** People are more likely to get a Staph infection if they have:

- Skin-to-skin contact with someone who has a Staph infection
- Contact with items and surfaces that have Staph on them
- Openings in their skin such as cuts or scrapes
- Crowded or group living conditions
- Poor hygiene

What are the symptoms of MRSA infections and how serious are they?

Most Staph skin infections are minor and may be easily treated. The symptoms are usually a painful, red area of skin, sometimes accompanied by a raised bump or hard area, which might be an abscess (also called boil). Sometimes people also have fevers and chills.

Many people think they have a spider or bug bite, but it really is an MRSA infection and is not related to bugs or spiders. Some facilities have spent a lot of money on exterminators trying to deal with “spider” bites.

Staph also may cause more serious infections, such as infections of the bloodstream, surgical sites, or pneumonia. Sometimes, a Staph infection that starts as a skin infection may worsen. It is important to contact your doctor if your infection does not get better

How is MRSA treated?

Treatment for a Staph skin infection may include taking an antibiotic and/or having a doctor drain the infection. If you are given an antibiotic, be sure to take all of the doses, even if the infection is getting better, unless your doctor tells you to stop taking it. If the infection doesn’t start getting better within 2-3 days, go back to the doctor. **Do not share antibiotics with other people or save them to use later.**

If someone you know has a skin infection, make sure that they see a doctor to have it evaluated. Ask the doctor to do a culture to check if it is MRSA. Encourage friends or roommates to tell you if they have MRSA or any other type of skin infection.

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What can you do about MRSA?

Practice good hygiene:

- Cover all skin infections with clean bandages, especially if they are draining or producing pus.
- Keep your hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
 - Many people don't know how to wash their hands correctly. [Click here](#) for proper hand washing instructions.
 - If you don't have soap and hot water easily accessible, you can use alcohol gel or foam instead.
- Shower at least once a day using soap.
- Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healed.
- Avoid contact with other people's wounds or bandages.
- Avoid sharing personal items such as towels or razors.
- Launder towels and sheets regularly. All clothing and bedding items should be cleaned in hot water with detergent and heat dried rather than air-dried.
 - People who handle dirty laundry should use gloves when doing so.
- Clean common areas, especially bathrooms, with strong cleaning fluid on a regular basis. (At least once a day if possible.)
 - [Click here](#) for information on appropriate cleaning solutions and techniques.) This includes toilet seats. If individuals have infections in their rectal or genital region, they should use paper seat covers or clean the toilet seat after every use.
- Remove wooden seats/chairs from bathroom areas and replace them with plastic or metal chairs that can be cleaned properly. If this is not possible, make sure people cover the wooden surface with clean cloth or paper before sitting on it.

How can you learn more about MRSA? Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/hip/Aresist/ca_mrsa.htm
http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_mrsa_ca_public.html#8