



State of Tennessee

Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA)

Fact Sheet



What is MRSA?

Staphylococcus Aureus or “staph” is a common type of bacteria that normally live on the skin and sometimes in the nasal passages of healthy people. Sometimes the bacteria get inside the body through a break in the skin and cause an infection. These infections are usually treated with antibiotics. When common antibiotics don't kill the bacteria, it means the bacteria have become resistant to those antibiotics. Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus Aureus* (MRSA) is a strain of staph bacteria that has become resistant to Methicillin. Infections range from mild to very serious, even life-threatening.

How do individuals get MRSA?

Anyone can get MRSA. You can get it the same way you can get a cold, such as by touching someone or something that has the bacteria on it and then touching your eyes, nose, or sores. MRSA can live on surfaces and objects for months. However, it can be killed through proper cleaning methods.

What does MRSA look like?

Most often, MRSA causes infections on the skin. These infections may look like any one of the following:

- Sores that look and feel like spider bites (Note: MRSA is not caused by a spider bite.)
- Large, red, painful bumps under the skin (called boils)
- A cut that is swollen, hot and filled with pus
- Blisters filled with fluid (impetigo)

It is also possible to have MRSA in other areas of the body, such as blood and lungs. These types of infections are less common, although often more serious.

How are MRSA infections treated?

The treatment for MRSA skin infection depends on severity and type of skin infection. Draining the skin sore may be the only treatment needed for a local skin MRSA infection. This can be done at the doctor's office. Fortunately, most MRSA still can be treated by specific antibiotics. It is important to finish all doses of antibiotics that you have been

prescribed, even if you feel better. Stopping treatment early by not finishing the full course of antibiotics can lead to further drug resistance in the bacteria, or can cause an infection that seemed to be gone, but comes back (relapse). Other treatments may be needed for more serious infections usually given in the hospital setting.

How can the spread of MRSA be controlled?

The key to preventing MRSA infections is for everyone to practice good hygiene:

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

Prevent spreading MRSA skin infections that you have to others it by following these steps:

1. Keep wounds that are draining, or have pus, covered with clean, dry bandages until healed. Bandages and tape can be discarded with the regular trash.
2. Your close contacts should wash their hands frequently with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand rub, especially after changing the bandage or touching the infected wound.
3. Avoid sharing personal items, such as towels, washcloths, razors, or clothing.
4. Wash sheets, towels, and clothes that become soiled with water and laundry detergent.
5. Maintain a clean environment.
6. Tell any healthcare providers who treat you that you have or had a staph or MRSA skin infection.

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