



MRSA – Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*

What is *Staphylococcus aureus* (staph)?

- *Staphylococcus aureus* (Staf-lo-coc-cus aw-ree-us) is a bacterium that is commonly carried in the nose and on the skin of healthy people. The bacterium is often referred to as “staph.” It is estimated that 30 percent of the population carries staph on the skin or in the nose. Methicillin or penicillin and cephalosporins are generally used to treat staph infections. About 1 percent of persons have a type of staph resistant to these antibiotics called methicillin- resistant *staph aureus*, which is often referred to as MRSA. Other antibiotics must be used to treat MRSA infections. The drug Vancomycin has proven to be the most effective and reliable in these cases, but it is used intravenously and is not effective against MRSA when taken by mouth. Over the past 20 years, MRSA infections have occurred among patients in hospitals or long-term care facilities. However, MRSA infections are becoming more common in otherwise healthy persons who have not had contact with health care personnel or patients. These infections are known as “community- associated MRSA” or CA-MRSA infections.

What does a staph infection look like?

- Most infections caused by staph are skin infections, such as pimples or boils. Staph skin infections can be red, painful, swollen, or have pus or other drainage. More serious staph infections can also cause pneumonia and infections of the blood and joints.

How is staph spread?

- Staph can be easily spread by contaminated hands that have not been properly washed. It also can be transmitted by contact with secretions from infected skin lesions, wounds and nasal discharge, and objects and surfaces contaminated with staph. MRSA is not spread easier, but it is more difficult to treat.
- Close skin-to-skin contact; openings in the skin, such as abrasions or cuts; contaminated items or surfaces; and crowded living conditions are some factors linked to the spread of staph or MRSA skin infections among athletes,

children, military recruits and correctional facility inmates.

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

- **Cover your wound.** Keep wounds that are draining or have pus covered with clean, dry bandages.
- **Follow your health care provider's instructions.** Pus from infected wounds can contain staph or MRSA. Keeping the infection covered will help prevent the spread to others. Bandages or tape can be thrown away with the regular trash.
- **Wash your hands.** You, your family, and others in close contact should wash hands often with soap and warm water, especially after changing a bandage or touching an infected wound. You can use an alcohol-based hand gel when soap and water are not available.
- **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 soiled sheets, towels, and clothes with water and laundry detergent. Drying clothes in a hot dryer, rather than air-drying, also helps kill bacteria in clothes.
- **Talk to your doctor.** Tell any health care providers who treat you that you have or had a staph or MRSA skin infection.

What to do to prevent staph skin infections

- Keep your hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand gel.
- 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.

Additional recommendations are available for the control of staph or MRSA skin infections when multiple cases occur in a group or school setting. Contact your local public health department or the Illinois Department of Public Health at 217-782-2016 for more information.

Adapted from MRSA information published by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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HANDWASHING

Good hand-washing techniques include washing your hands with soap and water.

Antibacterial soaps have become increasingly popular in recent years. However, these soaps are no more effective at killing germs than is regular soap. Using antibacterial soaps may lead to the development of bacteria that are resistant to the products' antimicrobial agents — making it even harder to kill these germs in the future. In general, regular soap is fine. The combination of scrubbing your hands with soap — antibacterial or not — and rinsing them with water loosens and removes bacteria from your hands.

PROPER HANDWASHING WITH SOAP AND WATER

- Wet your hands with warm, running water and apply liquid soap or use clear bar soap. Lather well.
- Rub your hands vigorously together for at least 15 to 20 seconds. (The time it takes to sing the “ABC” song twice or “Yankee Doodle Dandy.”)
- Scrub all surfaces, including the backs of your hands, wrists, between your fingers and under your fingernails.
- Rinse well.
- Dry your hands with a clean or disposable towel.
- Use a towel to turn off the faucet.

A SIMPLE WAY TO STAY HEALTHY

Hand washing doesn't take much time or effort, but it offers great rewards in terms of preventing illness. Adopting this simple habit can play a major role in protecting your health.