

Quick Facts

About...Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) in Schools

What is *Staphylococcus aureus*?

Staphylococcus aureus (staph) bacteria are commonly found on the skin (armpit, groin, and genital areas) and in the nose of many people and normally do not cause illness. However, when these bacteria enter the body through a break in the skin, they can cause small infections such as pimples and boils. Staph can also cause serious infections such as bloodstream or bone infections, pneumonia, and surgical wound infections but are rare in healthy persons. Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) is a type of staph bacteria that is resistant to the antibiotic methicillin and other antibiotics related to penicillin.

How is MRSA spread?

MRSA is spread by close contact with an infected person, either by direct skin contact or indirect contact with shared objects or surfaces, such as shared towels, razors, soap, wound bandages, bedding, clothes, hot tub or sauna benches, and athletic equipment. Wound drainage or pus is very infectious.

Where do MRSA skin infections occur?

MRSA skin infections can occur anywhere. Areas where there is crowding, frequent skin-to-skin contact, compromised skin, contaminated items or surfaces, and a lack of cleanliness are of increased risk for transmission of infection. Common locations would include schools, dormitories, daycare centers, correctional facilities, and households.

How do I know if I have MRSA?

In the community most MRSA infections appear as boils that are red, swollen, painful and have pus or other drainage. These skin infections commonly occur where there has been an open area on the skin such as cuts, abrasions, or skin trauma, and areas of the body covered by hair (back of neck, groin, buttock, armpit, and men's beard). You should contact your health care provider. Most MRSA skin infections can be effectively treated by drainage of pus with or without antibiotics.

Symptoms of MRSA infection may include:

- Red, swollen, warm, and painful pimple, boil, or blistered areas

- Pus or other drainage
- Fever and chills
- A wound that looks like a spider bite

How can MRSA be treated?

Seeing your health care provider early on will prevent the infection from becoming worse. If your health care provider prescribes an antibiotic, take it exactly as directed and be sure to finish all doses. (See Quick Facts [about Antibiotic Use and Antibiotic Resistance](#).)

How is MRSA prevented?

- Wash your hands properly and often. (See Quick Facts [about Hand Washing](#).)
- Keep infected areas covered with a clean, dry bandage.
- Avoid direct contact with another person's wound, drainage, or bandages.
- Avoid contact with surfaces contaminated with wound drainage.
- Do not share personal hygiene items, such as washcloths, towels, razors, toothbrushes, soap, nail clippers, clothing, or uniforms.
- Clean shared athletic equipment and surfaces before use.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,
http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_mrsa_in_schools.html

This page was last reviewed December 1, 2008.



Indiana State
Department of Health