

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

MRSA



Burlington County Health Department

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Public Health
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Burlington County Health Department
Health Starts Here

What is MRSA?

MRSA (Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus) infection is a type of staph bacteria that is resistant to many antibiotics that normally treat staph infections. It is a common cause of hospital-acquired infections.

Who gets MRSA?

Anyone can get MRSA, but Most MRSA infections occur in people who have been in hospitals or other health care settings, such as nursing homes and dialysis centers. When it occurs in these settings, it's known as health care-associated MRSA (HA-MRSA). HA-MRSA infections typically are associated with invasive procedures or devices, such as surgeries, intravenous tubing or artificial joints. When MRSA occurs in the wider community among healthy people, it is called community-associated MRSA (CA-MRSA). It is spread by skin-to-skin contact. At-risk populations for CA-MRSA include high school wrestlers and those who play other skin-to-skin contact sports, child care workers, and people who live in crowded and unsanitary condition.

What are the symptoms of MRSA?

MRSA staph infections generally start as swollen, painful bumps that might resemble pimples or spider bites. The area might be warm to the touch, full of pus or other drainage, and accompanied by a fever.

These can quickly turn into deep, painful abscesses that require surgical drainage. Sometimes the bacteria remain confined to the skin, but it can borrow deep into the body, causing potentially life-threatening infections in bones, joints, surgical wounds, the bloodstream, heart valves, and lungs.

Sometimes, people may carry MRSA without having any symptoms. When people become infected outside of the hospital, symptoms usually consist of a pimple or boil.

How are MRSA infections diagnosed?

If you think you have MRSA, see your doctor right away. To diagnosis it, your doctor will take a small sample of the wound and send it to a lab for testing. It is important that MRSA get properly diagnosed because special treatment may be needed for confirmed MRSA cases.

What is the treatment for MRSA?

Most MRSA infections are treated with basic wound care. More severe cases can usually be treated with an antibiotic called vancomycin. Newer antibiotics are being developed to address this problem.

MRSA is the result of decades of often unnecessary antibiotic use. For years, antibiotics have been prescribed for colds, flu and other viral infections that don't respond to these drugs. Even when antibiotics are used properly, they contribute to the rise of drug-resistant bacteria because they don't destroy every germ they target. Bacteria live on an evolutionary fast track, so germs that survive treatment with one antibiotic soon learn to resist others. That is what makes treatment of MRSA so difficult.

How can the spread of MRSA be controlled?

Careful hand washing is the single most effective way to control spread of MRSA. Health care workers should wash their hands after contact with each patient. If the patient is known to have an MRSA infection, the health care worker should wear disposable gloves. Patients must also wash their hands to avoid spreading the bacteria to others.

In addition you should practice good hygiene daily:

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

What about contact with carriers?

If basic hygiene precautions are followed, MRSA carriers are not a hazard to others including their family and friends.

Can I get a staph or MRSA infection at my health club or gym?

It is possible to become infected by staph or MRSA at your health club by direct skin-to-skin contact with another person or by contact with surfaces or equipment (less likely). You can protect yourself from infections by practicing good hygiene by:

- Keeping your hands clean by washing with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand rub and showering after working out;
- Covering any open skin area such as abrasions or cuts with a clean dry bandage;
- Avoiding sharing personal items such as towels, soaps or razors;
- Using a barrier (e.g., clothing or a towel) between your skin and shared equipment;
- Wiping surfaces of equipment before and after use.

Where can I get more information?

- Your doctor, nurse or clinic
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at: <http://www.cdc.gov/>
- The Burlington County Department of Health at (609)265-5548
- The New Jersey Department of Health website at: www.nj.gov/health