

Kent County Health Department

MRSA Fact Sheet

(Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*)



HEALTH
DEPARTMENT
Caring today for a healthy tomorrow

What is MRSA?

Staphylococci or “staph” are bacteria that live on the skin and in the nose, usually without causing harm. MRSA is a type of staph. It is resistant to several types of antibiotics. Bacteria develop resistance to antibiotics when antibiotics are used often.

- Infected hair follicles
- Fluid filled blisters (impetigo)
- Skin sores that look like insect bites

Minor MRSA infections can sometimes develop serious complications such as spread of infection to surrounding tissues, abscesses, or blood, bone, or heart infections.

Who gets MRSA?

Anyone can get MRSA. It is found most often among people in hospitals and healthcare facilities (such as nursing homes) who have weakened immune systems.

How is MRSA treated?

Since MRSA is resistant to many antibiotics, it can be hard to treat. However, some antibiotics can successfully cure MRSA infections.

How is MRSA spread?

MRSA bacteria can spread by:

- Touching the infected skin or wound of anyone who has MRSA
- Sharing objects such as towels or athletic equipment with someone who has MRSA

It is important to take all of the doses of your antibiotic even if the infection is getting better. The last few pills kill the toughest germs. Tell your doctor if your infection does not get better in a few days or if you begin to feel worse.

MRSA is almost always spread through physical contact, not through the air. If you have MRSA in your nose, you can spread the bacteria just by touching your nose and then someone else.

Some people can carry MRSA in their nose but don't have symptoms of an infection. They usually do not need treatment, but should be aware of how to protect themselves and others from becoming sick.

What do MRSA infections look like?

MRSA bacteria are found mainly on the skin, in the nose, in wounds, or in blood and urine. They can also be found in other body sites. It is most likely to cause infection when a person has a break in the skin or other openings where bacteria can get inside the body.

Do I need to do anything special when the infection is gone?

After the infection has cleared up, MRSA bacteria may still be living in your nose. You still need to take precautions to prevent spreading the MRSA bacteria from your nose to other people. Wash your hands often, especially after touching your nose. When you cough, cover your nose and mouth with a tissue. Throw the tissue in a waste basket and wash your hands.

Common skin conditions caused by MRSA include:

- Infected cuts
- Boils

If your infection comes back or if you have a similar new infection later, cover the area with a bandage (if it is a skin infection). See a doctor as soon as possible. Tell the doctor that you have had MRSA in the past.

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How can MRSA be prevented?

The best way to prevent MRSA is to wash your hands often. If you don't have access to soap and water, you can kill the MRSA or staph germs by using an alcohol based hand sanitizer.

You also must think about where MRSA bacteria are on your body. If you have a skin infection, you should keep the area covered with dry bandages and clothing, if possible. Change the bandage often, especially if the bandage gets wet. Make sure any drainage (pus or fluid) that comes out of your wound does not get onto other people or objects that others might touch. After you touch your infected site, wash your hands immediately.

If MRSA is in your lungs, cover your mouth with a tissue when you cough. Throw the tissue in a wastebasket and wash your hands. If MRSA is in your urine, be sure to clean your bathroom well. If other people handle your urine, they should use gloves and wash their hands well afterwards.

Preventing the spread of MRSA in the home

- Clean surfaces and other commonly touched areas (doorknobs, light switches, etc) with a disinfectant often.
- If body fluids such as wound drainage get onto surfaces, clean and disinfect these surfaces well.
- Do not share towels, razors, toothbrushes, or other personal items.
- Change your sheets often, especially if you have a draining wound.
- When picking up dirty linen or clothing, hold it away from your body to prevent MRSA germs from getting onto your clothing.
- If linens or clothing are contaminated with body fluids such as wound drainage, wash them separately from the rest of the family's clothing.

- Use hot water and bleach for laundry. Using a hot dryer can also help kill bacteria.
- Contaminated waste items, such as bandages and tissues, can be thrown out in your normal garbage.
- To prevent others from coming in contact with this garbage, make sure it is in a securely tied plastic bag.

Preventing the spread of MRSA in the community

People with active MRSA infections should stay home until they are able to completely contain the drainage with bandages. If you must leave your home:

- Cover all sores with clean, dry bandages. If possible keep bandages covered with clothing.
- Carry alcohol based hand cleaner with you so you can clean your hands if water is not available.
- Do not work out at a public gym. School children should not take part in contact sports. Sweating can cause bandages to loosen and lead to skin-to-skin or skin-to-equipment contact allowing the bacteria to spread.
- Do not use a public sauna, hot tub or pool.
- Avoid personal care services (haircut, manicure, massage) where you could spread the infection to others until your sores have healed.

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for talking with a health care provider. If you have any questions about MRSA or think you may have it, call your health care provider.