

Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA)

Questions and Answers

What is MRSA?

Staphylococcus aureus is a type of bacteria commonly found on the skin or in the nose of healthy individuals. Some *Staphylococcus aureus* is resistant to certain antibiotics, which makes it more difficult to treat than a normal Staph infection. The name methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, or MRSA, is used for the drug resistant strain of the bacteria.

How common is MRSA?

Staphylococcus aureus bacteria is one of the most common causes of skin infections in the United States. The occurrence of MRSA infections is on the rise in Florida and nationwide. In response to this increase, the Florida Department of Health investigates potential outbreaks of MRSA infections and provides education to the public and healthcare community.

How is MRSA spread?

MRSA is most commonly spread among individuals having close physical contact with an infected person, although a person can have MRSA on their skin, show no sign of illness, and still spread the bacteria. An individual can also become infected by touching objects contaminated with MRSA. Objects such as towels, sheets, wound dressings, clothes, and razors can become contaminated from the skin of an infected individual. MRSA is not spread through the air. Contaminated hands play a significant role in spreading the bacteria, either directly person to person or indirectly by contaminating objects.

What are the symptoms of a MRSA infection?

MRSA infections are typically minor infections of the skin and can be treated effectively with appropriate skin care and antibiotics to which the organism is susceptible as determined by laboratory testing. MRSA infections can begin as a small pimple/boil, which may progress to a larger pus-filled carbuncle. The carbuncles/boils can spread to other sites on the body if left untreated. Severe disease or death is not common, especially if the infection is treated quickly and appropriately.

How will I know if I have a MRSA infection?

A laboratory test is necessary to determine if an individual is infected with MRSA. Typically, the infection is drained and a sample of the fluid/pus from the infection is tested by a laboratory.

What can I do to prevent MRSA in myself and keep from spreading a MRSA infection to others?

- Wounds and breaks in the skin should be washed clean with soap and water as soon as possible, and kept clean. Waterless hand sanitizers containing alcohol are also effective.
- Follow your healthcare provider's instructions for treatment. Antibiotics need to be taken according to directions and *only* according to directions. When antibiotics are prescribed, they should be taken to completion, even if the wound is healing. Also, do not self-medicate with leftover antibiotics
- Keep all infections, especially those that are draining or are pus-filled, covered with clean, dry bandages.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and warm water. Individuals who may change your bandages should also wash their hands with soap and warm water. Alcohol based hand hygiene products are also good. These products are readily available in stores and can be carried in your pocket or purse.
- Avoid sharing personal items, including towels, clothes, bedding, other linens and razors.
- Wash linens and clothes with hot water and laundry detergent. Dry clothes in a hot dryer, rather than air-drying, this will help kill the bacteria.
- Do not lance/cut open any skin infection/boil yourself, as this could cause further infection. Drainage and good wound care may be all that is needed to allow an infection to heal on its own, but a medical provider should be consulted for any skin infection or boil that appears to require incision and draining.

Who can I call for additional information about MRSA?

For more information call the Bureau of Epidemiology, Florida Department of Health at 850-245-4401 or consult the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at:
http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/submenu/sub_staphylococcus.htm