

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT MRSA

What is MRSA?

Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) is a type of staph that is not killed by penicillin and similar antibiotics. About 1 out of every 100 people carries MRSA without making them sick. In California over half of all the staph infections are caused by MRSA. MRSA infections do not look any different than those caused by ordinary staphylococcus aureus. (which can easily be treated by different antibiotics).

What do staph and MRSA infections look like?

Common skin conditions caused by staph and MRSA may look like any of the following:

- Sores that look and feel like spider bites (but are not spider bites);
- Red painful bumps under the skin, called boils or abscesses;
- A cut that is swollen, hot, and filled with pus;
- Blisters filled with fluid or red skin with a honey-colored crust (usually on the face); or
- Red, warm, firm skin area that is painful and getting larger (usually on the legs).

How does a person get staph or MRSA?

Staph and MRSA can be spread when a person:

- Has direct skin-to-skin contact with an infected person,
- Touch surfaces that have staph on them from someone else's infection (e.g. towels, athletic equipment, used bandages).

Staph is not usually passed through the air.

How are staph and MRSA infections treated?

Some staph skin infections are treated by draining the sores and may not require antibiotics. Draining these sores should be done by a doctor. If the doctor gives you antibiotics, make sure you take all of the medicine, even if the infection is getting better. Call your doctor back if the infection does not get better after a few days. If other people you know or live with get the same infection tell them to go to their doctor.

Is it possible to have another staph or MRSA skin infection after it is cured?

Yes. It is possible to have another staph or MRSA skin infection after it is treated. To keep this from happening, follow the doctor's orders while you have the infection, and follow the prevention steps listed in this article.

What should I do if I think my child has MRSA?

If you think your child has MRSA, call a doctor.

Can a child with an MRSA infection go to school?

Unless the doctor advises not to attend school, children should be allowed to attend school as long as their infection is not draining and can be covered by a dry dressing. If the child is involved in a physical activity or sport that involves skin-to-skin contact

with other students, return to those activities should be approved by a school official or doctor.

Do schools need to be closed and disinfected if a student has an MRSA infection?

No. MRSA is spread mostly by direct contact with an infected person or from touching surfaces that have staph on them from someone else's infection. If the student's infections have been covered, then no special cleaning is needed. Cleaning and disinfection should be done on surfaces that are likely to come in contact with uncovered or poorly covered infections.

What is the easiest way to prevent MRSA and staph infections?

Frequent hand washing. If soap and running water is not available and hands do not have visible dirt on them, staph germs can be killed by using an alcohol-based hand rub.

What else can be done to help prevent MRSA and staph infections?

- Bathe regularly,
- Take good care of the skin; avoid skin damage, clean damaged skin promptly with soap and water,
- Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healed. Pus from infected wounds can contain staph and MRSA.
- Don't share personal items such as towels, clothing, or other items that touch skin, and use a barriers between your skin and shared equipment such as weight-training benches.
- Wash soiled clothes, sheets, and towels with water and laundry detergent and dry completely in a hot dryer.

For more information about MRSA and staph infections, contact your doctor, local health department or school nurse.