

# What is MRSA?

MRSA stands for Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus. Methicillin is an antibiotic and Staphylococcus aureus is the bacteria that is resistant to it. MRSA has been around since the 1960's in hospitals and long-term care facilities. It has been tracked by the CDC since 2004 in community settings. 25% of people have the bacteria on their skin and/or nasal passages. MRSA causes skin infections that appear as pustules, turf burn, spider bites or boils that are red, swollen, painful, or have pus or other drainage. These infections often occur at sites of visible skin trauma (cuts, scrapes). They also occur where there is hair (head, back of neck, groin, armpit, beard area of men).

MRSA can be treated by healthcare professionals. They may drain the pus if present and apply a clean dry bandage to the area. Treatment may or may not include treatment with antibiotics. If antibiotics are prescribed it is important to take the full course even if symptoms disappear. Serious infections such as pneumonia, bloodstream infections or bone infections are rare in otherwise healthy people who get the skin infection.

MRSA is transmitted through skin-to-skin contact and/or contact with shared items or surfaces that have come into contact with a persons infection (towels, countertops, bedding, gym or sports equipment, bar soap, doorknobs, tabletops)

Protecting yourself from MRSA is fairly simple. It starts with practicing good hygiene and keeping hands clean by washing with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. It is also a good idea to shower immediately after exercise. If you have open cuts or scrapes, it is important to cover them with clean dry bandages. If you are already infected with MRSA, it is important to keep the affected areas covered with bandages and clothing if possible.

No special soap needs to be used for hand washing. The important part is the actual hand washing. There is no need for special laundry soap either. Washing clothing and linens in hot water and drying in a hot air dryer will kill the bacteria. Any EPA approved product can be used to clean surfaces. Please follow the directions carefully.

Here are the quick facts about MRSA:

- MRSA is treatable but can become serious if left untreated
- See a health care professional if you have an open wound that is infected.
- Don't share personal care items like towels, razors or brushes.
- Wash your hands frequently throughout the day.
- Keep all open wounds covered with a clean dry bandage and wear clothing that covers the area.

If you want to find out more about MRSA, the following websites have accurate information on them.

- [www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar\\_mrsa.html](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_mrsa.html)
- [http://www.medicinenet.com/mrsa\\_infection/article.htm](http://www.medicinenet.com/mrsa_infection/article.htm)
- <http://nj.gov/health/cd/mrsa/index.shtml>
- <http://www.bergenhealth.org>
- [http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar\\_mrsa.html](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_mrsa.html)

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