

MRSA FACT SHEET
Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

What is MRSA?

MRSA stands for methicillin-resistant **Staphylococcus Aureus** which is a type of “Staph” bacteria. Staph bacteria are one of the most frequent causes of skin infections in the U.S. Most of the time these skin infections are minor, but Staph can also cause serious infections.

Symptoms

MRSA skin infections are generally minor, such as pimples, boils and other skin conditions. They are often mistaken for spider bites. Left untreated, these infections can get worse. These infections could spread to the bloodstream or lungs, causing serious illness and possibly death. If you suspect a MRSA skin infection, you should seek medical attention.

Can MRSA be treated?

Yes, MRSA can be treated. It is resistant to certain types of antibiotics which makes it more difficult to treat. But there are other antibiotics that are still able to kill the MRSA bacteria. Treatment may also include draining the boil/abscess by a healthcare provider.

If an antibiotic is prescribed, it is critical to TAKE ALL THE ANTIBIOTICS, even if the infection is getting better. Don't share antibiotics with other people or save unfinished antibiotics for use at another time.

How is MRSA spread?

Staph bacteria, including MRSA, are almost always spread by direct physical contact. **Staph bacteria are not spread through the air.** The bacteria can also spread when people come into contact with objects that have been contaminated with the bacteria. These objects include towels, clothing, bedding, gym or sports equipment, soiled bandages, bars of soap, contaminated surfaces, etc.

Should infected students/employees be excluded from school?

School should **not** be closed and classes should **not** be cancelled.

People who are infected are permitted to attend school/work as long as they are compliant with infection control measures. Skin infections should be kept clean and bandaged.

Students who participate in contact sports **may be excluded** from participating if they **cannot keep their wound bandaged**. If there are multiple confirmed cases of MRSA infections among members of a particular sport, and the sport team shares common equipment, that sports team may be closed down temporarily. These recommendations should be made in consultation with the local Health Department.

Should parents be notified if a student has a MRSA infection?

New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services (NJDHSS) does **not** recommend parent notification for isolated cases. However, if a particular school chooses to notify parents, please do so **in coordination with your local Health Department**. The local Health Department will review any letters for technical accuracy and can assist with phone inquiries from concerned parents.

What can schools do to prevent MRSA infections?

- 1) Provide students/parents with information about MRSA and preventive behaviors.
- 2) Encourage frequent handwashing by students and employees.
- 3) Encourage proper personal hygiene among students and employees such as showering after sports activities, wearing clean clothing, etc.
- 4) Discourage the sharing of personal items such as clothing, towels, bar soap, sports equipment, etc.
- 5) Ensure proper environmental cleaning with EPA approved disinfectants.
- 6) Encourage staff and students to keep any wounds bandaged and to consult with their healthcare provider for evaluation of any suspicious skin lesions.

Should any special soap be used for handwashing?

Any kind of soap is fine for handwashing. It does not have to be antibacterial. Frequent handwashing is very important and the act of washing is more important than the type of soap.

Should special laundry detergent be used?

There is no need for special laundry detergent. Washing clothing in hot water with regular laundry detergent and drying in a hot air dryer will kill the bacteria.

Should special disinfectants be used?

There is no need for special disinfectants. Use an EPA approved product and follow use instructions carefully.

Reducing the Risk

If you think you may have a staph skin infection, see your healthcare provider right away. They will tell you how you can best protect yourself and others from this infection.

Take the following steps to prevent the spread of antibiotic-resistant staph skin infections to others:

- 1) Cover skin infections with clean bandages. Pus and drainage from the infection can easily spread to others. Wear clothing that covers the infected area.
- 2) Clean your bathroom and personal care items frequently.
- 3) Wash towels, bedding and clothing in hot water and bleach. Dry these items in a hot air dryer to help kill the bacteria.

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