

What is MRSA?

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MRSA is an acronym meaning Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*. *Staphylococcus aureus* is commonly referred to as *Staph*, and is a bacterium found in the nose or on the skin of about 20-30% of the US population. Most people carry "staph" on their skin without any signs or symptoms of infection. However, if the "staph" gets into cuts or abrasions it may cause mild to severe skin and soft tissue infections, and more seriously blood stream infections, pneumonia, and toxic shock syndrome.

MRSA (methicillin resistant *staphylococcus aureus*) is a form of staph that is resistant to antibiotics. That means that many antibiotics that would be used to treat an infection caused by "staph" just won't work. Since the 1960's MRSA has appeared in hospitals or long term care settings, occurs more often in older persons, those who have been on antibiotics, have had surgery, or have had an indwelling device such as a ventilator, urinary catheter, or IV. This form of MRSA is called health care-associated (HA) MRSA and about 15% of the US population carries HA MRSA.

In the 1990's MRSA infections began appearing in people other than those listed above, people out in the community living their daily lives. This is called CA MRSA, or community-associated MRSA, I want to share with you what this looks like and let you know there are precautions that can be taken to prevent the spread of CA MRSA.

CA MRSA

What does it look like?

CA MRSA skin infections usually appear as pimples, boils, or abscesses and can be mistaken for "spider bites". Most of these infections can be cured without the need for antibiotics; but be aware that if treatment with antibiotics is needed, there are antibiotics that still work quite well for CA MRSA infections. The problem with CA MRSA is that it can spread to other people quite easily by direct person to person contact through cuts in the skin and also by contaminated objects, surfaces, and equipment.

PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF CA MRSA

- Keep skin clean- wash hands often with soap and water or use alcohol-based sanitizing gel, if your hands are not visibly soiled. Shower or bathe routinely, especially after athletic activities.
- Keep skin healthy, wear protective clothing and gear during contact sport activities, wear gloves while gardening, use lotions to keep skin moist and sunscreen to prevent blisters due to sunburn.
- Do not share towels, razors, bars of soap, water bottles, or other personal items.
- Cover cuts, scrapes, and tears in the skin with a protective bandage or dressing. If the wound cannot be covered and there is drainage, DO NOT go to school, work, day care, or participate in sport activities. Once drainage can be contained and the wound can be covered, you may resume activities.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces of exercise and sports equipment before and after use. Products recommended include Lysol or a bleach solution (1 cup bleach and 9-cups water). Kitchen and bathroom countertops, toilets and doorknobs, and any other areas commonly touched by a person's hands or skin, should be disinfected.

Persons at highest risk are participants in organized sport activities, such as football, baseball, etc., wrestlers, users of health clubs and gyms, those in the military, children under age 2, and those incarcerated.

If you have any questions about MRSA, please contact your doctor or your local public health department, the state department of public health can be reached at 608-266-1251, or you may check the web site at <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov/communicable/resources.htm>

This information is from the Division of Public Health, and the Wisconsin Antibiotic Resistance Network.