Play By Play
Tips on Helping to Reduce the Spread of MRSA Infections in Your Community
Staphylococcus aureus or Staph is a type of bacteria commonly found on the skin and in the nose. Staph is found on the skin or in the nose in up to one-third of healthy people. In most cases Staph lives in these areas of the body and does not cause infections. “Carriers,” or people who carry the bacteria but do not have any symptoms, can also transmit the bacteria to other people. However, for unclear reasons, a small percentage of people develop Staph infections. Most Staph infections are very minor, such as pimples and boils. However, some Staph infections can be more serious and life-threatening.

An MRSA infection?

“MRSA” stands for methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus – which is a type of staph bacteria that is resistant to antibiotics. Like other types of Staph, MRSA can live in the nose or on the skin without causing any symptoms. MRSA can also cause infections in persons who have MRSA in their nose or skin but can also cause infections in persons who were known never to have had MRSA living in their nose or skin.

MRSA can be more challenging to treat than Staph because it cannot be eliminated by some commonly used antibiotics. Like other types of Staph, the infections it causes are usually minor, such as pimples and boils. However, some MRSA infections can be more serious and life-threatening.
Community-Associated MRSA (CA-MRSA)?

In the past, MRSA infections happened most commonly in hospitals and nursing homes. More recently, a new type of MRSA has been identified that is spreading out in the community - among healthy people.

It is possible for Community-Associated MRSA to spread in sports and fitness facilities, locker rooms, homes, childcare centers, schools, military barracks, prisons, and other settings where people gather. MRSA has been in the news a lot because it has caused serious or deadly infections in previously healthy persons. Fortunately, these infections are rare.

Symptoms of an MRSA infection?

MRSA, like other Staph bacteria, can cause a skin infections such as pimples, rashes, abscesses, boils or what can look like a spider bite, and these infections are usually warm, painful, red or swollen. Most Community-Associated MRSA infections are these type of skin infections.

Sometimes MRSA can cause more serious problems, like bloodstream infections or pneumonia.
MRSA spread?

MRSA is usually spread by skin-to-skin contact. The bacteria may also spread by contact with personal items, like towels or athletic equipment, that have been contaminated with the bacteria and then shared with other people. MRSA infections can spread among household members, athletic team members, prison inmates, military personnel or other people who have frequent close contact or share personal items.

Remember that “carriers,” or people who carry the bacteria but do not have any symptoms, can also transmit the bacteria to other people. Since carriers may have no symptoms of infection, everyone should use common sense prevention measures to minimize their risk of acquiring MRSA.

help prevent the spread of MRSA?

Since MRSA infections can be serious, and the bacteria can be easily passed along through contact, it is crucial to take steps to help prevent the spread of MRSA. Places in the community where people gather – like locker rooms, childcare centers, sports and fitness facilities, schools, prisons, military barracks, and even homes – are important locations for prevention steps, since bacteria are more easily spread in close quarters.
Hand Hygiene

Regular hand washing is a critically important way to prevent the spread of MRSA, since the bacteria are most often spread through skin-to-skin contact. Everyone should wash hands with soap and water before preparing food, before eating, after using the bathroom, when hands are visibly dirty, and especially after touching an open sore or wound or changing bandages.

Plaint soap is effective in removing MRSA, so antimicrobial soap is not necessary. The process of scrubbing your hands with soap and rinsing them with water is enough to loosen and remove bacteria from your hands, if you follow the guidelines below. It is also best for public settings to offer liquid soap rather than bar soap. When soap and water are not available, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer rub is a good alternative. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers work as good or better than soap and water at eliminating viruses and bacteria, such as MRSA, from the hands.

Hand Washing

- Wash hands using soap and warm, running water.
- Rub hands vigorously during washing for at least 15 seconds (as long as it takes to sing “Happy Birthday” twice)
- Pay special attention to the backs of the hands, wrists, fingertips, between the fingers and under the fingernails.
- Rinse hands well while leaving the water running.
- With the water running, dry hands with a single-use towel.
- Turn off the water using a paper towel, covering washed hands to prevent re-contamination.
Hand Sanitizing with Sanitizing Spray — How To Do It:

• Apply one to two pumps on palm-side of each hand while holding hand in a “claw” position. Target trouble spots like nails and cuticles.
• Shuffle fingertips in palm of wet hand for three seconds (repeat with other hand). Target trouble spots like fingertips and palms.
• Interlock fingers on both hands and move in and out for 3 seconds. Reach into the spaces between fingers.
• Rub hands vigorously for 10 seconds to cover remainder of hands and wrists.
• Allow hands to air dry – make sure enough product is applied for hands to remain wet for at least 15 seconds.

General Hygiene

In addition to washing hands, it is always a good idea to:
• Cover skin cuts and abrasions with a clean, dry bandage until healed
• Avoid sharing personal items, like towels or razors, that come into contact with your bare skin
• Always use a barrier, like clothing or a towel, between your skin and shared equipment such as weight-training benches. Shower or bathe after using shared equipment.
Stop MRSA now

**Surface Disinfection**

MRSA bacteria can remain on surfaces after someone touches them, making it possible for someone else to pick them up. It is not well understood how long MRSA can survive on surfaces, but MRSA probably can live for many days on most objects. All washable (hard, non-porous) surfaces of bathrooms and living areas should be disinfected routinely, especially in public settings like schools and workplaces.

If no disinfection instructions exist, use 1 tablespoon of disinfecting bleach diluted in 1 quart of water (1:100 concentration), or use another Environmental Protection Agency-approved disinfectant according to the manufacturer’s instructions to disinfect commonly touched surfaces.

Any surface exposed to sweat, saliva, or other body fluids should be thoroughly disinfected daily and as-needed, using the 1:100 bleach solution described above or another appropriate EPA-approved disinfectant. Shared items like exercise equipment should also be routinely wiped clean between uses with a clean, dry towel.
Disinfecting Surfaces

• Wear disposable gloves and create a fresh bleach solution every day.

• Clean visibly soiled surfaces with a detergent prior to disinfection with bleach. Excess soil or organic matter on surfaces can inactivate disinfectants, making them less effective.

• Apply the disinfectant bleach to the surfaces and follow the specific instructions on “contact time” (typically 10 to 20 minutes).

• To avoid contact with skin, use clean gloves and cloths/rags to wipe down surfaces after the appropriate time has elapsed. After cleaning, dispose of or properly disinfect rags and cloths.

It’s important to know that repeatedly using the same cloth on consecutive surfaces can actually spread the bacteria from one surface to another and to the hands of the person doing the cleaning.

Remember the five simple steps to help prevent the spread of MRSA!

Scrub up - Wash hands for at least 15 seconds (enough time to sing “Happy Birthday” twice), or use alcohol-based hand rub sanitizer

Wipe it down - Use a bleach solution to disinfect surfaces (1 tablespoon of disinfecting bleach diluted in 1 quart of water)

Cover your cuts – Keep any nicks or wounds covered until healed

Keep to yourself – Do not share personal items

Use a barrier – Keep a towel or clothing between skin and shared equipment
stop MRSA now

What do you do if you think someone might have an MRSA infection?

Make sure the person keeps the area of the skin infection clean, dry and covered. Anyone who suspects they may have an MRSA infection they should see a licensed health care provider, especially if the infection is large, painful, warm to the touch, or does not heal by itself.
Special Considerations for Athletic Facilities and Teams

- Ensure contact sports athletes with active skin and soft tissue infections properly cover and contain any open wounds. If the wounds cannot be covered or contained, delay participation until wounds are completely healed.
- Instruct students not to share personal hygiene items such as towels, washcloths, razors and soap.
- Encourage use of a barrier (like a towel or layer of clothing) between the skin and shared equipment or common surfaces like locker room benches.
- Establish a routine for disinfecting and cleaning common surfaces.
- Strongly encourage athletes and coaches participating in sports involving close personal contact (like wrestling and football) to shower immediately after each practice, game or match.
- Strongly encourage athletes to wash athletic clothing after each use.
- Encourage athletes to report skin infections, pimples, boils, etc. to coaches.
- Encourage coaches to assess athletes regularly for skin infections and report findings.
- Notify parents of suspected MRSA infections.
Special Considerations for Schools

When an MRSA infection occurs within the school population, the school nurse and school physician should determine whether students, parents and staff should be notified. Consultation with the local public health authorities should be used to guide this decision. Any decision to close a school for any communicable disease should be made by school officials in consultation with local and/or state public health officials. In most cases, it is not necessary to close a school because of an MRSA infection in a student. MRSA transmission can be prevented by simple prevention steps.

• Unless directed by a physician, students with MRSA infections should not be excluded from attending school.
• Exclusion from school and sports activities should be reserved for those with wound drainage (“pus”), those with healing wounds that cannot be covered and contained with a clean, dry bandage, and for those who cannot maintain good personal hygiene.
• Teachers should be instructed to refer children to the school nurse if they have open, draining wounds or infections.
• Schools should ensure hand washing and/or hand sanitizer stations are available throughout the school.
• Teachers and staff should enforce hand hygiene with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizers before eating and after using the bathroom.
• Students with skin infections may need to be referred to a licensed health care provider for diagnosis and treatment. School health personnel should notify parents/guardians when possible skin infections are detected.
• Notify parents of suspected MRSA infections.
Special Considerations for Childcare Centers

• Childcare centers should encourage staff to:
  • Minimize hand and wrist jewelry.
  • Keep nails shorter than 1/4-inch, and do not wear acrylic nails.
  • Wear gloves during diaper changes.
  • Wear gloves when touching anyone’s cuts, scrapes or wiping noses, etc.
  • Enforce appropriate hand hygiene and surface sanitation procedures.
  • Clean and sanitize toys that come in contact with children’s mouths before they are passed on to other children.
  • Notify parents of suspected MRSA infections.
Resources

For more information, refer to your local health department or visit the following resources: