

MRSA: Antibiotic-resistant “Staph” Skin Infections

An increasing number of people are being diagnosed with skin infections caused by *Staphylococcus aureus* (“staph”) bacteria that are resistant to many antibiotics (drugs that kill bacteria). These resistant strains of staph are known as “MRSA” (methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*). The Minnesota Department of Health is working with healthcare providers to better understand why this is happening and how to prevent antibiotic (drug) resistant staph skin infections from spreading.

What is a staph skin infection?

Staph bacteria are often found in the noses and on the skin of people. Most of the time staph carried in the nose or on the skin does not cause infection and when it does, it usually causes minor infections, such as boils or abscesses. However, sometimes staph can cause more serious infections such as pneumonia, joint, and bloodstream infections. Staph infections often begin when staph bacteria enter the body through an injury to the skin. Symptoms of a staph skin infection include redness, warmth, swelling, tenderness of the skin, and boils or blisters.

How do staph skin infections spread?

The cleanest person can get a staph infection. Staph can rub off the skin of an infected person and onto the skin of another person when they have prolonged skin-to-skin contact. Staph from an infected person can also get onto a commonly shared item or surface, and then get onto the skin of the person who touches it next. Examples of commonly shared items are towels, benches in saunas or hot tubs, and athletic equipment - in other words, anything that could have touched the skin of a staph infected person can carry the bacteria to the skin of another person.

How can I prevent myself from getting infected?

Clean your hands and skin often. Avoid prolonged skin-to-skin contact with anyone you suspect could have a staph skin infection. Do not share personal items (e.g. razors, towels, etc.) with other persons and keep your towels and clothes clean. Clean items that you share with other people (e.g. towels, razors, athletic equipment) before you use them.

What should I do if I think I have a staph skin infection?

If you suspect that you might have a staph skin infection, consult your healthcare provider as soon as possible. Early treatment can help prevent the infection from getting worse. Be sure to follow all the directions your healthcare provider gives you, even when you start to feel better. If you are prescribed antibiotics, finish all of the doses because incomplete treatment of staph infections can lead to antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

If my healthcare provider has told me that I have an antibiotic-resistant staph (MRSA) skin infection, what can I do to keep others from getting infected?

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

1. Keep the infected area covered with clean, dry bandages. Pus or drainage from infected wounds is very infectious.
2. Wash your hands frequently with soap and warm water, especially after changing your bandages or touching the infected skin. Throw used dressings away promptly.
3. Regularly clean your bathroom and personal items. Wash soiled towels, bedding and clothes with hot water and bleach, when possible. Drying bedding and clothes in a hot dryer, rather than air-drying also helps kill bacteria.
4. Tell any healthcare providers who treat you that you have a history of an antibiotic-resistant staph (MRSA) skin infection.
5. Do not share razors, towels or similar items with others.

If you have questions about MRSA, please talk with your health care provider.

Fact sheet adapted with permission from “Fact Sheet for Patients: Antibiotic-resistant ‘Staph’ Skin Infections” prepared by the Los Angeles Department of Health Services Public Health (www.lapublichealth.org)



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