

## Fact Sheet

# MRSA

**Also Known As:** Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus



www.scchealth.co | [f](#) /scchdmi | [t](#) @scchdmi

## What is MRSA?



Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) infection is caused by a strain of staph bacteria that has become resistant to the antibiotics commonly used to treat ordinary staph infections.

Most MRSA infections occur in people who have been in hospitals or other health care settings, such as nursing homes and dialysis centers. When it occurs in these settings, it's known as health care-associated MRSA (HA-MRSA). HA-MRSA infections typically are associated with invasive procedures or devices, such as surgeries, intravenous tubing or artificial joints.

Another type of MRSA infection has occurred in the wider community — among healthy people. This form, community-associated MRSA (CA-MRSA), often begins as a painful skin boil. It's spread by skin-to-skin contact. At-risk populations include groups such as high school wrestlers, child care workers and people who live in crowded conditions.

## Cause

Different varieties of Staphylococcus aureus bacteria, commonly called "staph," exist. Staph bacteria are normally found on the skin or in the nose of about one-third of the population. The bacteria are generally harmless unless they enter the body through a cut or other wound, and even then they usually cause only minor skin problems in healthy people.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, less than 2 percent of the population carries the type of staph bacteria known as MRSA.

## Signs and Symptoms

Staph skin infections, including MRSA, generally start as small red bumps that resemble pimples, boils or spider bites. These can quickly turn into deep, painful abscesses that require surgical draining.

## Diagnosis

Doctors diagnose MRSA by checking a tissue sample or nasal secretions for signs of drug-resistant bacteria. The sample is sent to a lab where it's placed in a dish of nutrients that encourage bacterial growth. But because it takes about 48 hours for the bacteria to grow, newer tests that can detect staph DNA in a matter of hours are now becoming more widely available.

## Treatment and Complications

MRSA infections can resist the effects of many common antibiotics, so they are more difficult to treat. This can allow the infections to spread and sometimes become life-threatening.

MRSA infections may affect a person's:

- Bloodstream
- Lungs

- Heart
- Bones
- Joints

## Preventing HA-MRSA

In the hospital, people who are infected or colonized with MRSA often are placed in isolation as a precaution to prevent the spread of MRSA. Visitors and health care workers caring for people in isolation may be required to wear protective garments and must follow strict hand hygiene procedures. Contaminated surfaces and laundry items should be properly disinfected.

## Preventing CA-MRSA

- **Wash hands.** Careful hand-washing remains the best defense against germs. Scrub hands briskly for at least 15 seconds, then dry them with a disposable towel and use another towel to turn off the faucet. Carry a small bottle of hand sanitizer containing at least 62 percent alcohol for times when there is not access to soap and water.
- **Keep wounds covered.** Keep cuts and abrasions clean and covered with sterile, dry bandages until they heal. The pus from infected sores may contain MRSA, and keeping wounds covered will help keep the bacteria from spreading.
- **Keep personal items personal.** Avoid sharing personal items such as towels, sheets, razors, clothing and athletic equipment. MRSA spreads on contaminated objects as well as through direct contact.
- **Shower after athletic games or practices.** Shower immediately after each game or practice. Use soap and water. Do not share towels.
- **Sanitize linens.** If a person has a cut or sore, wash towels and bed linens in a washing machine set to the hottest water setting (with added bleach, if possible) and dry them in a hot dryer. Wash gym and athletic clothes after each wearing.



***For more sources of information on this topic visit:***

ST. CLAIR COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT [www.scchealth.co](http://www.scchealth.co)

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES [www.michigan.gov/mdhhs](http://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs)

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

THE MAYO CLINIC [www.mayoclinic.org](http://www.mayoclinic.org)