

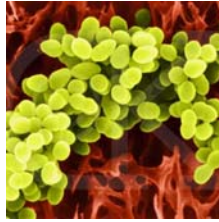
## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS: MRSA SKIN INFECTIONS

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### What is a MRSA?

A strain of a common, normally benign, skin infection that is resistant to common antibiotics.

Some bacteria that commonly live on the skin and in the nose are called staphylococcus or “staph” bacteria. Usually, staph bacteria don’t cause any harm. However, sometimes they get inside the body through a break in the skin and cause an infection. These infections are sometimes treated with antibiotics. When common antibiotics don’t kill the staph bacteria, it means the bacteria have become resistant to those antibiotics. This type of staph is called MRSA (Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus).



Anyone can get MRSA. Infections range from mild to very serious, even life-threatening. MRSA is contagious and can be spread to other people through skin-to-skin contact. If one person in a family is infected with MRSA, the rest of the family may get it.

### What is a MRSA skin infection?

It can be a pimple, rash, boil, or an open wound.

MRSA is often misdiagnosed as spider bites. Symptoms of a MRSA infection include redness, warmth, swelling, pus, tenderness of the skin, pimples, boils or blisters. MRSA infected skin lesions may progress quickly from a skin or surface irritation to an abscess or serious skin infection. If left untreated, MRSA can infect blood and bones.

### How do MRSA skin infections spread?

MRSA lives on skin and survives on objects for 24 hours or more.

The cleanest person can get a MRSA infection. In fact, about 1% of the population is colonized with MRSA, but never develops an infection. MRSA is most common in places where there are crowds of people (schools, jails). Drainage from skin lesions

can spread MRSA bacteria to other parts of a person’s body or to other persons. MRSA can rub off the skin of an infected person onto the skin of another person during skin to skin contact. It can also come off of the infected person onto a shared object or surface, and get onto the skin of the next person who uses it. Examples of commonly shared objects include towels, soap, benches in hot tubs, and athletic equipment—in other words, anything that could have touched the skin of a MRSA infected person can carry the bacteria to the skin of another person.

### How can I protect myself and my family from MRSA infection?

Wash your hands with soap and warm water.

It is important to understand that being exposed to MRSA does not necessarily mean you will be infected. Most people who are colonized with MRSA never develop an infection. Still, there are several things you can do to protect yourself:



- ✓ Wash your hands thoroughly and frequently with soap and warm water.
- ✓ Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered.
- ✓ Avoid skin contact and sharing personal items (e.g. towels) with anyone you suspect of having MRSA.
- ✓ Clean objects that you share with other persons, such as athletic equipment, before you use them.

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



Consult your doctor or healthcare provider.

If you think that you have a skin infection, consult your doctor or healthcare provider. Early treatment can help prevent the

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infection from getting worse. If you have a bad abscess, your healthcare provider should drain the pus. If you are prescribed antibiotics, be sure to take all of your pills. Be sure to follow directions from your healthcare provider closely, even when you start to feel better.

**If I have been diagnosed with a MRSA skin infection, what can I do to keep others from getting infected?**

Clean your bandages, your hands, your home.

- ✓ Keep cuts and scrapes clean with soap and water.
- ✓ Keep the infected area covered with clean, dry bandages. Pus from infected wounds can infect others.

- ✓ Wash your hands frequently with soap and warm water, especially after changing your bandages or touching infected skin.
- ✓ Wash clothes and other items that you use with hot water bleach. Drying clothes in a hot dryer, rather than air-drying, also helps kill MRSA in clothes.
- ✓ Clean objects that you share with other persons, such as athletic equipment, before you use it.
- ✓ Regularly clean your bathroom, kitchen, and all other rooms, as well as your personal items.
- ✓ Tell any healthcare providers who treat you that you have a MRSA skin infection.

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Adapted from Los Angeles County Public Health Department Staph Brochure