



Health Info



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FACT SHEET: *Methicillin Resistant "Staph" Skin Infections*

What is *Staphylococcus aureus* or "Staph"?

Staphylococcus aureus, often referred to simply as "Staph," are bacteria found on the skin or in the nose of 25% to 30% of healthy people. Sometimes Staph bacteria can cause an infection. Staph bacteria are among the most common causes of skin infections in the United States. Staph bacteria also can cause serious infections (such as surgical wound infections, bloodstream infections, and pneumonia).

What is methicillin resistant Staph or "MRSA"?

Most Staph bacteria are resistant to at least some antibiotics. MRSA is a type of Staph that is resistant to a specific group of antibiotics that are often used to treat Staph infections. Approximately 1% of the population carries MRSA on their skin or in their noses.

What is a Staph skin infection?

Staph skin infections often begin with an injury to the skin. Staph enters the broken or damaged skin and develops into an infection. A Staph skin infection in the early stages may resemble a spider bite or pimple. Symptoms of a Staph skin infection may include redness, warmth, swelling and tenderness. Boils or blisters may be present, and pus or other drainage may occur.

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 doctor or healthcare provider as soon as possible. Early treatment can help prevent the infection from getting worse. Be sure to follow each direction from your doctor or healthcare provider closely, even when you start to feel better. Weak or incomplete treatment of Staph infections can lead to antibiotic resistant bacteria.

How are Staph skin infections treated?

Many Staph skin infections are minor (such as pimples and boils) and can be treated without antibiotics. If pus is present in a boil or abscess, it may need to be drained. Drainage of skin boils or abscesses should only be done by a healthcare provider. Some more serious infections may require antibiotic treatment, either as an ointment or by mouth. If you are given an antibiotic to take by mouth, take all of the doses, even if the infection is getting better, unless your doctor tells you to stop taking it. If after visiting your healthcare provider the infection does not get better within a few days, contact him or her again. If other people you live with or have close contact with develop a similar infection tell them to see their healthcare provider.

How do Staph skin infections spread?

Even the cleanest person can get a Staph infection. Staph bacteria can rub off the skin of an infected person onto the skin of another person during prolonged skin to skin contact such as contact sports or sexual contact. Or, the Staph bacteria can come off the skin of an infected person onto shared objects or surfaces. If the object is not cleaned or disinfected, the next person who uses it is at risk for getting a Staph infection. Examples of commonly shared objects include personal items (i.e., towels, soap, razors, clothes), benches in saunas or hot tubs, and athletic equipment. In other words, anything that touches the skin of a Staph-infected person can spread the bacteria to the skin of another person.

How can I protect myself from getting a Staph infection?

- Keep your hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and water.
- Keep cuts and abrasions or scrapes on the skin clean and covered with a dressing (e.g., bandage) until healed.
- If your skin is dry use a moisturizer to prevent cracking.
- Avoid sharing personal items such as towels, washcloths, razors or clothing.
- Avoid contact with other people's wounds or material contaminated from wounds.

If I have a Staph or MRSA skin infection, what can I do to prevent others from getting infected?

- Keep wounds and lesions covered with clean, dry bandages. This is especially important when drainage is present.
- Wash hands with soap and warm water or alcohol-based hand rub after touching infected skin or contaminated bandages. Put disposable waste (e.g., dressings, bandages) in a separate trash bag and close tightly before throwing out with the regular garbage.
- Advise family members and other close contacts to wash their hands frequently with soap and warm water or alcohol-based hand rub, especially if they change your bandages or touch the infected area or anything that might have come in contact with the infected area.
- Consider using clean, disposable, nonsterile gloves to change bandages or clean the infected area.
- Do not share personal items (e.g. towels, washcloths, razors, clothing, or uniforms) or other items that may have been contaminated by wound drainage.
- Disinfect all non-clothing (and non-disposable) items that come in contact with the wound or wound drainage with a solution of one tablespoon of household bleach mixed in one quart of water (must be prepared freshly each day) or a store-bought, household disinfectant.
- Wash soiled linens and clothes with hot water and laundry detergent. Drying clothes in a hot dryer, rather than air-drying, may also help kill bacteria in clothes.
- Wash utensils and dishes with soap and hot water or using a standard home dishwasher.
- Avoid participating in contact sports or other activities with skin-to-skin contact until the infection has healed.
- Be sure to tell any healthcare providers who treat you that you have a MRSA infection, or a "resistant Staph infection".

Additional information on Staph infections and MRSA can be found at
http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/hip/ARELIST/ca_mrsa_public.htm
