



## MRSA: Commonly Asked Questions

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## What is MRSA?

- MRSA stands for **M**ethicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*
- It is a type of the bacteria *Staphylococcus aureus* or "staph" that is resistant to certain antibiotics



## What is "staph"?

- Staph is a bacteria that is commonly carried on the skin and in the nose of healthy people
- All staph, including MRSA, can cause an infection



## Does staph/MRSA always make people sick?

- No, about 30% of people carry staph on their skin or in their nose without causing infection
- They do not have skin infections or any signs or symptoms of illness
- This is called "colonization"
- About 1% of those people are carrying the MRSA form of staph



## How is staph/MRSA spread?

- Staph bacteria, including MRSA, are spread by direct skin-to-skin contact (shaking hands, wrestling, etc.) with someone who is infected or colonized
- Staph and MRSA may also be spread by touching contaminated items (towels, razors, shared sports equipment, etc.)



## Is staph/MRSA airborne?

- No, staph and MRSA are spread by direct skin-to-skin contact or contact with contaminated surfaces



## How do staph/MRSA infections start?

- Staph/MRSA infections start when this bacteria gets into breaks in the skin such as cuts, scrapes, and wounds
- Staph/MRSA skin infections can occur anywhere
- Other common infection sites include hairlines and where hair grows or is shaved



## What kinds of infections can staph/MRSA cause?

- Staph/MRSA can cause skin infections that look like pimples, boils, and rashes
- These infections can be red, swollen, and painful and may have drainage (pus)
- More serious infections include surgical site infections, pneumonia, and bloodstream infections



## What do staph/MRSA skin infections look like?



## How common are staph/MRSA infections?

- Staph bacteria are one of the most common causes of skin infections in the United States
- The majority of MRSA infections occur in hospitals
- MRSA infections are becoming more common in community settings



## How are staph and MRSA infections treated?

- Staph and MRSA skin infections may heal by themselves if kept clean and dry
- Infections that do not heal on their own may need to be evaluated by a doctor
  - The doctor may drain and clean infected boils and wounds
  - The doctor may prescribe an antibiotic
  - A doctor should treat serious staph infections
  - All prescribed antibiotics should be taken as directed by a doctor



## Can MRSA be cured?

- Yes, there are antibiotics that can be used to cure MRSA
- If antibiotics are prescribed it is very important for the patient to finish the medication as prescribed unless the healthcare provider says to stop
- Most MRSA infections heal on their own with good wound and skin care



## So what is the difference between staph and MRSA?

- Staph and MRSA are the same type of bacteria, but MRSA is resistant to antibiotics commonly used to treat regular staph infections
- Staph and MRSA are spread the same way and cause similar infections
- Both can be on someone's skin or in their nose without causing infections
- MRSA is less common but is increasing in the community



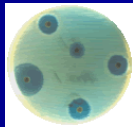
## Does MRSA cause more serious infections than other staph?

- MRSA does not usually cause more serious problems than other staph
- However, because special lab tests are used to identify MRSA there may be a delay in effective treatment if it is treated like regular staph
- Delays in effective treatment may prolong illness and lead to more serious infection



## How will my doctor know if I have a staph or MRSA infection?

- Your doctor will take a sample on a swab from the infected area
- The sample will be sent to a laboratory to see if the infection is caused by staph
- If it is caused by staph a second test will be used to see if it is MRSA



## Why not use the antibiotics used to treat MRSA to treat all staph infections?

- Bacteria may become resistant to the stronger antibiotics
- We have a limited number of different types of antibiotics
- Stronger antibiotics can be more toxic to the body



## What should I do if I think I have a staph or MRSA infection?

- Keep the area clean and dry
- See a doctor, especially if the infection is large, painful, warm to the touch, or does not heal by itself



## Should I get a test to find out if I am a carrier of MRSA?

- No, because staph and MRSA can live on a person without causing illness
- Treating it will not prevent the bacteria from colonizing or infecting a person again



## How do I prevent staph and MRSA infections?

- Practicing good hygiene
  - Keeping hands clean by frequent hand washing using soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer
  - Washing hands after direct contact with other people's skin
  - Showering immediately after participating in exercise or sports



## How do I prevent staph and MRSA infections?

- Avoiding sharing personal item such as towels, razors, etc that come into contact with your bare skin
- Keep wounds covered
- Do not touch other people's wounds
- Wash sporting and exercise equipment and gear between uses



## How do I prevent staph and MRSA infections?

- Maintaining a clean environment by establishing routine cleaning procedures for frequently touched surfaces that come into direct contact with people's skin
- Surfaces that are contaminated with bodily fluids should be cleaned at least daily



## What is the best thing I can to to prevent infections?

- Regular hand washing is the best way to prevent getting and spreading staph, including MRSA
- Washing hands often with soap and water will prevent colds, flus and many other infections as well
- Stay healthy by getting your flu shot
  - Respiratory infections like influenza can make people more susceptible to bacterial infections



## I have a MRSA skin infection. How do I prevent spreading it to others?

- Clean your hands frequently
- Do not share personal items
- Keep the infection covered with a clean, dry bandage
- Follow your healthcare provider's instructions on proper wound care



## Why is MRSA a problem for schools?

- MRSA infections are becoming more common in community settings which include schools, but also include homes, dorms, workplaces, and gyms
- MRSA infections are spread by direct contact and there are many opportunities for this contact among students, such as among athletes



## Why is MRSA a problem for schools?

- MRSA outbreaks can cause much anxiety for parents, students, and staff
  - MRSA may look like other skin infections (remember, MRSA can only be diagnosed by a laboratory)
  - MRSA infections can vary widely in severity
- MRSA is part of a larger problem of antibiotic resistance



## What should schools do if there is a reported case of MRSA?

- Confirm the diagnosis
- Staff should follow routine infection control precautions
- Follow routine procedures for cleaning the environment



## Should students with MRSA infections be excluded from attending school?

- Unless directed by a physician, students with MRSA infections should not be excluded from attending school
- Students with MRSA should cover wounds with a clean, dry bandage



## Should the school close because of a MRSA infection?

- It is not necessary to close schools because of a MRSA infection in a student or staff
- MRSA transmission can be prevented by hand hygiene and covering infections
- Regular cleaning can help prevent spread of MRSA



## Should schools be closed to be cleaned or disinfected when a MRSA infection occurs?

- Special cleaning or special disinfectants are not necessary
  - Detergent-based cleaners or EPA-registered disinfectants are effective at removing MRSA
- Schools and other facilities need to follow their routine cleaning procedures which includes:
  - Regular cleaning of frequently touched surfaces
  - Daily cleaning of surfaces contaminated with bodily fluids
  - Sanitizing shared exercise and sports equipment



## Why are some schools closing and other not?

- GCHD does not recommend that schools close because of a MRSA infection
  - This is consistent with the recommendations of the CDC and MDCH
  - Ultimately it is a school's decision
- There is no evidence that closing schools and special cleaning are effective against MRSA infection
- Good personal hygiene is the best prevention method



## Should the entire school community be notified of every MRSA infection?

- Usually, it should not be necessary to inform the entire school community about a single MRSA infection
- Remember, staph, including MRSA, have been and remain a common cause of skin infections



## Should the school be notified that my child has a MRSA infection?

- Consult with your school about its policy for notification of staph and MRSA infections



## What else can schools and parents do to prevent MRSA?

- Encourage good personal hygiene, especially frequent hand washing
- Schools can ensure students and staff have access to sinks, soaps, and clean towels
- Discourage sharing of personal items
- Staff and students should be observed for wounds
- Require students and staff with wounds that have drainage report to the office or school nurse
- Students and staff should contact a physician if they have wounds that are not healing
- Encourage students and staff to get their flu shot



## Is MRSA required to be reported to the Health Department?

- Individual cases of MRSA are not required to be reported to the Health Department
  - Remember, MRSA is becoming more common in the community
  - Hospitals have been dealing with MRSA infections for many years
  - MRSA is preventable and treatable
- However, outbreaks are required to be reported
  - An outbreak is defined as three or more cases in a facility that are epidemiologically linked where transmission is likely to have taken place



## How many cases of MRSA are there in Genesee County?

- Because individual cases of MRSA are not reportable, we do not know how many cases are in Genesee County
- Schools are not required to report individual cases so we do not have information about MRSA in a particular school



## What are the most important things I should know about MRSA?

- MRSA is not scary
  - MRSA is not a "superbug"
  - It is curable and in most cases by just keeping the wound clean and dry
- MRSA is preventable
  - Along with many other communicable diseases, MRSA is preventable in all community settings by practicing good personal hygiene
  - Frequent hand washing is the best defense
- Do your part to stop antibiotic resistance
  - Be sure to finish antibiotics your physician prescribes to you unless the physician tells you to stop
  - Antibiotics should not be taken for viral illnesses like a cold