

# WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT ... MRSA

## WHAT IS STAPH?

Staphylococcus aureus (“*staph*”) bacteria are one of the most frequent causes of skin infections in the United States. These skin infections are minor most of the time, but *staph* can also cause serious wound infections, bloodstream infections and pneumonia.

*Staph* is often found on the skin or in the noses of healthy people and do not usually cause illness. Staph can cause minor skin infections such as pimples or boils that can be red, swollen and painful, and often have pus or other drainage. These infections can be treated by a health care provider by draining the wound and/or with antibiotics.

## WHAT IS MRSA?

Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, or *MRSA*, is a type of staph that are resistant to certain antibiotics, making it more difficult to treat. While between 25-30 percent of healthy people are colonized with *staph* (when bacteria are present, but not causing an infection), one percent are colonized with *MRSA*.

In the past, *MRSA* was usually seen in hospitals, long term care facilities and prisons. However, community-associated *MRSA* (*CA-MRSA*) is becoming more prevalent in the general population especially among children, care givers in day care centers and athletes.

## 10 FACTS ABOUT MRSA

- 1 Anyone can get *MRSA*. Even healthy people with healthy skin can become infected.
- 2 People can become infected with *MRSA* by touching an infected person or contaminated objects and surfaces. The bacteria can then enter the body through cuts, scrapes or other openings in the skin.
- 3 Even though *MRSA* skin infections are resistant to certain antibiotics, early diagnosis and treatment can stop the infection from getting worse.
- 4 *MRSA* is can spread easily among people who spend time in close contact with each other, such as household members and participants in close-contact sports like football or wrestling.
- 5 *MRSA* is NOT spread through droplets in the air like a cold or flu.
- 6 High risk behaviors for contact with *MRSA* include:
  - Sharing items such as razors, bar soap, cosmetics, towels, athletic gear, or syringes
  - Getting tattoos or body piercings with unsterile equipment
  - Any sexual activity or close physical contact with a *MRSA*-infected person
- 7 Cover skin infections with clean bandages. Pus and drainage from the infection can easily spread to others.

- 8 People with weakened immune systems, including those with HIV infection, may be at risk for more severe illnesses if they are infected with *MRSA*.
- 9 *MRSA* usually causes minor skin infections such as pimples or boils. They are often mistaken for spider bites. Left untreated, these infections can get worse and spread to the bloodstream or lungs, causing serious illness and possibly death. Seek medical attention if you suspect a *MRSA* skin infection.
- 10 Tell all your health care providers if you have a history of *MRSA* skin infection.

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## PROTECT YOURSELF FROM MRSA

- Cover all cuts, scratches or scrapes with a clean bandage to protect the non-intact skin from all bacteria, not just *MRSA*.
- Keep hands clean by washing with soap and warm water or using an alcohol-based sanitizer.
- Don't share personal items such as razors, toothbrushes, towels, uniforms or equipment.
- Avoid contact with other people's wounds or bandages.
- Shower after playing sports or going to a gym or health club.
- If possible, place a barrier (towel or clothing) between your skin and shared equipment. Wipe the surface of equipment before and after you use it with a disinfectant.
- Wash bedding, towels and clothes that may have had contact with infected skin, wound or bandage with detergent or bleach and hot water. Dry these items in a hot air dryer.

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## TAKE ANTIBIOTICS WISELY

Two main pathogens (germs) - bacteria and viruses - cause most infections. Antibiotics can only cure illnesses caused by bacteria ... they cannot kill viruses. Viruses cause most sore throats, colds and the flu, coughs (bronchitis), many middle ear and sinus infections.

Each time we take antibiotics, sensitive bacteria are killed, but a few resistant ones are left to grow and multiply, passing their resistance to future generations of the mutated bacteria. These bacteria have learned ways to become immune to the effect of antibiotics, becoming *antibiotic resistant*.

Take medicine as prescribed by your health care provider. **ALWAYS** complete the full course of antibiotics, even if you are feeling better before the medicine is finished. Never save some of the medicine to treat yourself or others later.

**NEVER TAKE ANTIBIOTICS FOR A VIRAL INFECTION.** If your health care provider says you do not have a bacterial infection, do not demand that he prescribe an antibiotic. Recovery from a viral illness only occurs when the infection has run its course.



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## WEST WINDSOR HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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