

# MRSA

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) is a type of bacteria that is resistant to certain antibiotics.**

### **WHAT DOES A STAPH OR MRSA INFECTION LOOK LIKE?**

Staph bacteria, including MRSA, can cause skin infections that may appear as pustules or boils which often are red, swollen, painful, or have pus or other drainage. These skin infections commonly occur at sites of visible skin trauma, such as cuts and abrasions, and areas of the body covered by hair (e.g., back of neck, groin, buttock, armpit, beard area of men). More serious infections may cause pneumonia, bloodstream infections or surgical wound infections.

### **WHAT IS COMMUNITY-ASSOCIATED MRSA (CA-MRSA)?**

Staph and MRSA can also cause illness in persons outside of hospitals and healthcare facilities. MRSA infections that are acquired by persons who have not been recently (within the past year) hospitalized or had a medical procedure (such as dialysis, surgery, catheters) are known as CA-MRSA infections. Staph or MRSA infections in the community are usually manifested as skin infections, such as pimples and boils and occur in otherwise healthy people.

### **HOW COMMON ARE STAPH AND MRSA INFECTIONS?**

Staph bacteria are one of the most common causes of skin infection in the United States and are a common cause of pneumonia, surgical wound infections and bloodstream infections. The majority of MRSA infections occur among patients in hospitals or other healthcare settings; however, it is becoming more common in the community setting.

### **ARE STAPH AND MRSA INFECTIONS TREATABLE?**

Yes. Most staph and MRSA infections are treatable with antibiotics. If you are given an antibiotic, take all of the doses, even if the infection is getting better, unless your doctor tells you to stop taking it. Do not share antibiotics with other people or save unfinished antibiotics to use at another time.

However, many staph skin infections may be treated by draining the abscess or boil and may not require antibiotics. Drainage of skin boils or abscesses should only be done by a healthcare provider.

If after visiting your healthcare provider the infection is not getting better after a few days, contact them again. If other people you know or live with get the same infection tell them to go to their healthcare provider.

### **IS IT POSSIBLE THAT MY STAPH OR MRSA SKIN INFECTION WILL COME BACK AFTER IT IS CURED?**

Yes. It is possible to have a staph or MRSA skin infection come back (recur) after it is cured. To prevent this from happening, follow your healthcare provider's directions while you have the infection, and follow the prevention steps after the infection is gone.

### **HOW CAN I PREVENT STAPH OR MRSA SKIN INFECTIONS?**

*Practice good hygiene:*

1. Keep your hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
2. Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healed.
3. Avoid contact with other people's wounds or bandages.
4. Avoid sharing personal items such as towels or razors.

## **SHOULD STUDENTS WITH MRSA SKIN INFECTIONS BE EXCLUDED FROM ATTENDING SCHOOL?**

Unless directed by a physician, students with MRSA infections should not be excluded from attending school.

Exclusion from school and sports activities should be reserved for those with wound drainage (“pus”) that cannot be covered and contained with a clean, dry bandage and for those who cannot maintain good personal hygiene.

## **IS THERE A TEST FOR MRSA?**

If you have a skin infection, your health care provider may take a sample of the fluid. This is called taking a culture. The lab will then test the bacteria to find out which antibiotic is best for you.

If your MRSA infections keep coming back again and again, your health care provider may test you or your family members to see if you are carriers. In this case, the provider would take a culture sample from the nose, where MRSA is often found.

## **IF I HAVE A STAPH, OR MRSA SKIN INFECTION, WHAT CAN I DO TO PREVENT OTHERS FROM GETTING INFECTED?**

1. **Cover your wound.** Keep wounds that are draining or have pus covered with clean, dry bandages. Follow your healthcare provider’s instructions on proper care of the wound. Pus from infected wounds can contain staph and MRSA, so keeping the infection covered will help prevent the spread to others. Bandages or tape can be discarded with the regular trash.
2. **Clean your hands.** You, your family and others in close contact should wash their hands frequently with soap and warm water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, especially after changing the bandage or touching the infected wound.
3. **Do not share personal items.** Avoid sharing personal items such as towels, washcloths, razors, clothing or uniforms that may have had contact with the infected wound or bandage. Wash sheets, towels and clothes that become soiled with water and laundry detergent.
4. **Talk to your doctor.** Tell any healthcare providers who treat you that you have or had a staph or MRSA skin infection.

## **CAN MY PETS GET MRSA?**

Pets, such as dogs and cats, can also get MRSA. Pets can have active infections or they can be carriers. If you keep getting MRSA infections, or if you see any signs of a skin infection on your pet, talk with your vet about testing your pet. Pets with MRSA can be treated. You do not need to get rid of your pet.

## **WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I THINK I HAVE A STAPH OR MRSA INFECTION?**

Call Student Health Services at (785) 864-9507 or your medical provider for an appointment right away. Tell the person making your appointment that you suspect that you might have a staph or MRSA infection.

**THIS IS AN EXTREMELY IMPORTANT PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURE THAT WILL HELP LIMIT THE SPREAD OF ILLNESS TO OTHERS.**

## **WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION ON MRSA?**

Student Health Services  
[www.studenthealth.ku.edu](http://www.studenthealth.ku.edu)  
Main Number: (785) 864-9500  
Nurse Help Line: (785) 864-9583

Kansas Department of Health and Environment  
[www.kdheks.gov/epi/infectious\\_disease.htm](http://www.kdheks.gov/epi/infectious_disease.htm)  
Phone: 877-427-7317

Centers for Disease Control  
[www.cdc.gov/Features/MRSA/](http://www.cdc.gov/Features/MRSA/)  
1-800-CDC-INFO

## **FOR MEDIA INQUIRIES, CONTACT:**

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