

## General Information About MRSA in the Community



*Staphylococcus aureus*, a type of staph bacteria that is resistant to several antibiotics. In the general community, MRSA can cause skin and other infections. In a healthcare setting, such as a hospital or nursing home, MRSA can cause severe problems such as [bloodstream infections](http://www.cdc.gov/HAI/bsi/bsi.html) (<http://www.cdc.gov/HAI/bsi/bsi.html>), [pneumonia](http://www.cdc.gov/HAI/vap/vap.html) (<http://www.cdc.gov/HAI/vap/vap.html>) and [surgical site infections](http://www.cdc.gov/HAI/ssi/ssi.html) (<http://www.cdc.gov/HAI/ssi/ssi.html>). For more information visit [MRSA in healthcare settings](/mrsa/healthcare/index.html) (</mrsa/healthcare/index.html>).

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### Who is at Risk, and How is MRSA Spread in the Community?

Anyone can get MRSA through direct contact with an infected wound or by sharing personal items, such as towels or razors, that have touched infected skin. MRSA infection risk can be increased when a person is in certain activities or places that involve crowding, skin-to-skin contact, and shared equipment or supplies. This might include athletes, daycare and school

students, military personnel in barracks, and people who recently received inpatient medical care.

## How Common is MRSA?

Studies show that about one in three people carry staph in their nose, usually without any illness. Two in 100 people carry MRSA. There are not data showing the total number of people who get MRSA skin infections in the community.

## Can I Prevent MRSA? How?

There are the personal hygiene steps you can take to reduce your risk of MRSA infection:

- Maintain good hand and body hygiene. Wash hands often, and clean body regularly, especially after exercise.
- Keep cuts, scrapes, and wounds clean and covered until healed.
- Avoid sharing personal items such as towels and razors.
- Get care early if you think you might have an infection.

## What are MRSA Symptoms?

Often, people first think the area is a spider bite; however, unless a spider is actually seen, the irritation is likely not a spider bite. Most staph skin infections, including MRSA, appear as a bump or infected area on the skin that might be:

- Red
- Swollen
- Painful
- Warm to the touch
- Full of pus or other drainage
- Accompanied by a fever

Click here for [photos of MRSA infections \(/mrsa/community/photos/index.html\)](/mrsa/community/photos/index.html).

## What Should I Do If I See These Symptoms?

If you or someone in your family experiences these signs and symptoms, cover the area with a bandage, wash your hands, and contact your doctor. It is especially important to contact your doctor if signs and symptoms of an MRSA skin infection are accompanied by a fever.

## What Should I do if I Think I Have a Skin Infection?

- You can't tell by looking at the skin if it is a staph infection (including MRSA).
- Contact your doctor if you think you have an infection so it can be treated quickly. Finding infections early and getting care will decrease the chance that the infection will become severe.
  - Signs of infection include redness, warmth, swelling, pus, and pain at sites where your skin has sores, abrasions, or cuts. Sometimes these infections can be confused with spider bites.
  - Infections can also occur at sites covered by body hair or where uniforms or equipment cause skin irritation or increased rubbing.
- Do not try to treat the infection yourself by picking or popping the sore.

- Cover possible infections with clean, dry bandages until you can be seen by a doctor, nurse, or other health care provider such as an athletic trainer.

## How to Prevent Spreading MRSA If You Have MRSA

- Cover your wounds. Keep wounds covered with clean, dry bandages until healed. Follow your doctor's instructions about proper care of the wound. Pus from infected wounds can contain MRSA so keeping the infection covered will help prevent the spread to others. Bandages and tape can be thrown away with the regular trash.
- Clean your hands often. You, your family, and others in close contact should wash their hands often with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand rub, especially after changing the bandage or touching the infected wound.
- Do not share personal items. Personal items include towels, washcloths, razors, clothing, and uniforms.
- Wash used sheets, towels, and clothes with water and laundry detergent. Use a dryer to dry them completely.
- Wash clothes according to manufacturer's instructions on the label.

## How are MRSA skin infections treated?

Treatment for MRSA skin infections may include having a healthcare professional drain the infection and, in some cases, prescribe an antibiotic. Do not attempt to drain the infection yourself – doing so could worsen or spread it to others. If you are given an antibiotic, be sure to take all of the doses (even if the infection is getting better), unless your doctor tells you to stop taking it.

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