



Centers for Disease  
Control and Prevention

# Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*

## General Information

### What is MRSA?

MRSA stands for methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, a type of bacteria that is r

### Outside of Healthcare Settings

In the community (where you live, work, shop, and go to school), MRSA most often causes pneumonia (lung infection) and other infections. If left untreated, MRSA can be severe and cause [sepsis](#)—the body's extreme response to an infection.

### In Healthcare Settings

In places such as a hospital or nursing home, MRSA can cause severe problems such as

- [bloodstream infections](#),
- [pneumonia](#), or
- [surgical site infections](#).

For more information visit [MRSA in healthcare settings](#).

## Who is at risk?

Anyone can get MRSA. The risk increases with activities or places that involve crowding, skin-to-skin contact, and shared equipment or supplies. Some of the people who carry MRSA can go on to get a MRSA infection. Non-intact skin, such as when there are abrasions or incisions, is often the site of an MRSA infection. Athletes, daycare and school students, military personnel in barracks, and those who receive inpatient medical care or have surgery or medical devices inserted in their body are at higher risk of MRSA infection.

## Video: Facebook Live with CDC Experts



[Vital Signs: Staph infections can kill \[23:13 Mins\]](#) [🔗](#)

## How is MRSA spread in the community?

MRSA is usually spread in the community by contact with infected people or things that includes through contact with a contaminated wound or by sharing personal items, such as have touched infected skin.

The opioid epidemic may also be connected to the rise of staph infections in communities. People who use opioids are 16 times more likely to develop a serious staph infection.

More about injection drug use and risk of infection on this [factsheet](#)  [\[PDF – 2 pages\]](#)

## How common is MRSA?

Approximately 5% of patients in U.S. hospitals carry MRSA in their nose or on their skin.

## How can I prevent a MRSA Infection?

You can take these steps to reduce your risk of MRSA infection:

- Maintain good hand and body hygiene. Clean hands often, and clean your body regularly.
- 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 symptoms of MRSA Infection?

The symptoms of a MRSA infection depend on the part of the body that is infected. For example, people with MRSA skin infections often can get swelling, warmth, redness, and pain in infected skin. In most cases it is hard to tell if an infection is due to MRSA or another type of bacteria without laboratory tests that your doctor can order. Some MRSA skin infections can have a fairly typical appearance and can be confused with a spider bite. However, unless you actually see the spider, the irritation is likely not a spider bite.

Most *S. aureus* 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

[Photos of MRSA infections.](#)

## What if I see these symptoms?

You cannot tell by looking at the skin if it's a staph infection (including MRSA).

Getting medical care early makes it less likely that the infection will become serious.

If you or someone in your family experiences the signs and symptoms of MRSA:

- Contact your healthcare provider, especially if the symptoms are accompanied by a fever.
- Do not pick at or pop the sore.
- Cover the area with clean, dry bandages until you can see a healthcare provider.
- Clean your hands often.

## How do I prevent the spread of MRSA?

- **Cover your wounds with clean, dry bandages until healed.**  
Follow your healthcare provider's instructions about proper care of the wound. Pus may contain MRSA.
- Do not pick at or pop the sore.
- Throw away bandages and tape with the regular trash.
- **Clean your hands often.**  
You, your family, and others in close contact should wash hands often with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand rub, especially:
  - after changing a bandage
  - after touching an infected wound
  - after touching dirty clothes
- Do not share personal items such as towels, washcloths, razors, and clothing, including hats.
- Wash laundry before use by others and clean your hands after touching dirty clothes.