



Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA)

What is *Staphylococcus aureus*?

S. aureus, sometimes called “staph”, is a common bacterium in the environment and on peoples’ skin. When the staph bacteria get into a person’s body, such as through a cut, they can cause infections. Most staph infections are not serious, but sometimes that can become very serious and require hospitalization.

What is MRSA?

MRSA is a kind of staph that is resistant to the antibiotic methicillin, and other antibiotics in the same class as methicillin. This makes it harder to treat infections caused by these bacteria, but there are other antibiotics that are still effective against MRSA.

What are the symptoms of MRSA infection?

MRSA can cause many different types of infections, but the most common is a skin infection. A skin infection will look like a bump or patch of skin that is red, swollen, painful, and feels warm when you touch it. There might be a bump that looks like it is full of pus or other fluid. Sometimes, people think this is a “spider bite”, although it is actually a bacterial infection. You can’t tell if a skin infection is MRSA or not just by looking at it. If you have the symptoms of a skin infection and it seems large or like it is getting worse, see a doctor. If you have the symptoms of a skin infection and a fever, consult your doctor promptly.

Sometimes, people can have MRSA living on their skin or in their nose without any symptoms. This is called “colonization”.

Who is at risk for getting an MRSA infection?

Generally, people who are healthy are not at high risk for MRSA infections. MRSA is most common in the healthcare environment, so most cases are among people who are already sick in the hospital. People who have weakened immune systems are at higher risk of infection. MRSA can be found in the community like normal staph, but this is less common. MRSA is sometimes seen in groups of people with frequent skin-to-skin contact, such as people on sports teams, or children in schools.

How is MRSA transmitted?

MRSA is transmitted by direct contact, which means you touch someone’s infected skin or a body fluid containing the bacteria, and it is transferred to your skin. MRSA can also be transmitted by items or surfaces that have become contaminated, such as a used bandage.



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People who are colonized with MRSA can spread the bacteria, but it is much less likely and requires more contact than someone who has an active infection.

How can I protect myself from MRSA?

The best way to protect yourself from MRSA is by washing your hands regularly, or using hand sanitizer. It is also a good idea to shower after participating in sports or exercise. If you have a cut or scrape, clean it out promptly and keep it covered with a clean, dry bandage until it has healed.

What kinds of disinfectants will work on MRSA? Do I need to do any special things to my laundry?

Disinfectants that say they are effective against *Staphylococcus aureus* will most likely also kill MRSA. You can check the labels of cleaning products to see if the product has been tested to kill staph. You can also check this list (https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2017-01/documents/20172701.listh_.pdf) of disinfectants that are registered by the EPA as effective against MRSA. It's important to follow the instructions on the label of disinfectants carefully to make sure they work. If the surface you're trying to disinfect is very dirty, you must clean it first to remove the grime before using a disinfectant.

When cleaning after an MRSA infection, focus on surfaces that receive a lot of bare-skin contact. These surfaces are called "high-touch surfaces", and include things like doorknobs, bed rails, and other handles. When cleaning public areas, such as gym spaces, you should also clean surfaces that may have come in contact with an uncovered infection. This might include benches or floor mats. Additional information about cleaning can be found on the CDC website: <https://www.cdc.gov/mrsa/community/environment/index.html>

You do not need to do anything special for laundry that may be contaminated with MRSA- just follow the clothing and laundry detergent label instructions. You can read more at this website: <https://www.cdc.gov/mrsa/community/environment/laundry.html>

Is MRSA reportable in Alaska?

MRSA is only reportable if there is a cluster of cases or an outbreak. Single cases of MRSA do not need to be reported. Vancomycin-resistant *S. aureus* (VRSA) is reportable. Additional testing is available through the Antibiotic Resistance Lab Network for suspected VRSA or other unusual resistance phenotypes: contact the HAI Program at 269-8000 to discuss.

Resources for Providers:

The CDC has many resources for both patients and providers at this website: <https://www.cdc.gov/mrsa/healthcare/index.html>



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Resources for the Public:

The CDC has a lot of information on their website: <https://www.cdc.gov/mrsa/community/index.html>

Athletes, coaches, and teams have specific information at this website:

<https://www.cdc.gov/mrsa/community/team-hc-providers/advice-for-athletes.html>

Schools and daycares can visit this website (<https://www.cdc.gov/mrsa/community/schools/index.html>)

or refer to the Infectious Disease Management Guidelines for Alaska Schools

<http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/wcfh/Documents/school/assets/InfectiousDiseaseManagementGuidelinesForAlaskaSchools.pdf>

Data and Publications regarding MRSA in Alaska:

Epi Bulletins about MRSA outbreaks:

<http://epibulletins.dhss.alaska.gov/Bulletin/DisplayClassificationBulletins/97>

Articles about MRSA in Alaska:

Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus aureus Carriage and Risk Factors for Skin Infections, Southwestern Alaska, USA https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/eid/article/16/5/09-0851_article

An outbreak of community-onset methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus skin infections in southwestern Alaska. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed?cmd=Retrieve&db=PubMed&list_uids=12828314&dopt=Abstract

Molecular epidemiology of methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus, rural southwestern Alaska.

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed?cmd=Retrieve&db=PubMed&list_uids=18976551&dopt=Abstract

Epi Bulletins about antibiotic resistance:

<http://epibulletins.dhss.alaska.gov/Bulletin/DisplayClassificationBulletins/208>