

MRSA FAQ

What is Staphylococcus aureus?

Staphylococcus aureus (staph) bacteria are commonly found on the skin (armpit, groin, and genital areas) and in the nose of many people and normally do not cause illness. However, when these bacteria enter the body through a break in the skin, they can cause small infections such as pimples and boils. Staph can also cause serious infections such as bloodstream infections, pneumonia, or surgical wound infections. Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) is a type of staph bacteria that is resistant to the antibiotic methicillin and other antibiotics related to penicillin.

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. Data from a prospective study in 2003, suggests that 12% of clinical MRSA infections are community-associated, but this varies by geographic region and population.

What does a staph or MRSA infection look like?

Staph bacteria, including MRSA, can cause skin infections that may look like a pimple or boil and can be red, swollen, painful, or have pus or other drainage. Many cases begin looking something like a spider type of bite. More serious infections may cause pneumonia, bloodstream infections, or surgical wound infections.

How can I prevent staph or MRSA skin infections?

Practice good hygiene:

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

If have a staph, or MRSA skin infection, what can I do to prevent others from getting infected?

You can prevent spreading staph or MRSA skin infections to others by following these steps:

- **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.
- **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.
- **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. Drying clothes in a hot dryer, rather than air-drying, also helps kill bacteria in clothes.
- **Talk to your doctor.** Tell any healthcare providers who treat you that you have or had a staph or MRSA skin infection.