



MRSA

Drug Resistant Staph Infection



Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus Aureus* (MRSA) refers to Staph bacteria that are resistant to a primary antibiotic Methicillin. MRSA is often resistant to other antibiotics, as well. While 25 - 30% of the U.S. population is colonized with staph (meaning that bacteria are present, but not causing an infection), approximately 1% is colonized with MRSA. MRSA infection is becoming more widespread than public health authorities had anticipated.

MRSA was responsible for 94,000 serious infections and nearly 19,000 deaths in 2005 – surpassing deaths from AIDS by more than 6,100 cases, according to an estimate published in the October 17, 2007 Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA).

There are two categories of MRSA, healthcare acquired and community acquired. Estimates are that the majority of MRSA cases originate in hospital settings. However, cases have been reported in schools, nursing homes, and other community settings, especially where there is close contact with a person who has recently been hospitalized.

Some key steps to preventing the spread of MRSA are educating the public, good personnel hygiene (especially hand washing), and appropriate interventions by healthcare facilities.

The continued widespread overuse of antibiotics is considered partly responsible for causing drug-resistant germ strains like MRSA to emerge. Often, people receive antibiotics for the common cold, flu, or other virus-caused illnesses. In these circumstances, the antibiotics will not only be ineffective, but may lead to future drug resistance.

Public health authorities are working to raise the awareness of emergency physicians across the country to be on the lookout for cases of antibiotic-resistant infections. Once identified, these patients should be isolated and treated with the few types of antibiotics that remain effective, to prevent them from developing potentially life-threatening complications or spreading their infection to others.

Because MRSA is easily spread by casual contact and can rapidly develop into a serious health condition, it is important that minor abscesses, boils and other skin infections be monitored and treated promptly with antibacterial medications and good hygiene practices. Experts advise that the public should seek medical attention if these conditions persist, become progressive, painful or disfiguring, or if the patient develops a fever or other more serious symptoms of illness.

Many MRSA infections can be treated, if caught early enough, by applying heat compresses and lancing and draining sores, and by administering certain appropriate medications. MRSA can become fatal if it is unrecognized or untreated. The key is to prevent the bacteria from spreading to the lungs, vital organs or the bloodstream, where it can cause life-threatening illness.

Of course, the best protection is always prevention. Among the steps the public can take to prevent MRSA:

- Practice good hygiene by frequently and thoroughly washing hands with soap and hot water or using an alcohol based skin sanitizer.
- Clean and disinfect cuts, abrasions, punctures and other wounds, and cover them with a bandage.
- Avoid contact with other people's open skin wounds, bandages or infections.

- Avoid sharing towels, razors, make-up applicators and other personal-care items that can transmit germs.
- Seek prompt medical attention for any wound or condition that shows signs of infection, e.g., fever, swelling, redness, or bad smell, fluid draining from the area or increasing pain.
- Be aware that common staph germs are more prevalent in public facilities, so more frequent adherence to good hygiene in such settings is recommended.

FAQS For MRSA in the Workplace

➤ **Can I get MRSA from someone at work?**

- ❖ MRSA is transmitted most frequently by direct skin-to-skin contact or contact with shared items or surfaces that have come into contact with someone else's infection (e.g., towels, used bandages).
- ❖ MRSA skin infections can occur anywhere. However, some settings have factors that make it easier for MRSA to be transmitted. These factors, referred to as the **5 C's**, are as follows: **C**rowding, frequent skin-to-skin **C**ontact, **C**ompromised skin (i.e., cuts or abrasions), **C**ontaminated items and surfaces, and lack of **C**leanliness. Locations where the **5 C's** are common include schools, dormitories, military barracks, households, correctional facilities, and daycare centers.

➤ **If I have MRSA, can I go to work?**

- ❖ Unless directed by a healthcare provider, workers with MRSA infections should not be routinely excluded from going to work.
- ❖ Exclusion from work 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 hygiene practices.
- ❖ Workers with active infections should be excluded from activities where skin-to-skin contact is likely to occur until their infections are healed.

➤ **What should I do if I think I have a staph or MRSA infection?**

- ❖ See your healthcare provider and follow your healthcare provider's advice about returning to work.

➤ **If I have staph, or a MRSA skin infection, what can I do to prevent the spread of MRSA at work and at home?**

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 uniforms, personal protective equipment, clothing, towels, washcloths or razors that may have had contact with the infected wound or bandage.
 - ❖ **Talk to your doctor.** Tell any healthcare providers who treat you that you have or had a staph or MRSA skin infection.
- **What should I do if my uniform, clothing, personal protective equipment, or workstation becomes contaminated with MRSA?**
- ❖ Wash uniforms, clothing, sheets and towels that become soiled with water and laundry detergent. Drying clothes in a hot dryer, rather than air-drying, also helps kill bacteria in clothes.
 - ❖ Clean contaminated equipment and surfaces with detergent-based cleaners or Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered disinfectants. It is important to read the instruction labels on all cleaners to make sure they are used safely and appropriately. Environmental cleaners and disinfectants should not be used to treat infections.

The EPA provides a list of EPA-registered products effective against MRSA:
<http://epa.gov/oppad001/chemregindex.htm>

- **What can my boss (employers) do to prevent the spread of staph or MRSA at the workplace?**

- ❖ Place importance on worker safety and health protection in the workplace
- ❖ Ensure the availability of adequate facilities and supplies that encourage workers to practice good hygiene
- ❖ Ensure that routine housekeeping in the workplace is followed
- ❖ Ensure that contaminated equipment and surfaces are cleaned with detergent-based cleaners or Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered disinfectants

Upon request, the PEF Health & Safety Department will provide factsheets, standards, regulations, and other resources. Contact us at 518-785-1900, ext. 254 or 1-800-342-4306, ext. 254.

Also, visit our webpage at www.pef.org.

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