



An Important Message from The Hospital & Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania: Community-associated MRSA Infection Poses Extra Threat to Students and Athletes



The Hospital & Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania (HAP) is a statewide membership services organization that advocates for nearly 250 Pennsylvania acute care and specialty hospitals, as well as the patients and communities they serve. Given the recent media attention that methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, or MRSA, has received, our members wanted to be sure to bring this issue to your attention. The hospital community is concerned about the spread of MRSA in and outside of the hospital setting. The incidence of Community-acquired (CA)-MRSA is increasing, especially among children and young people involved in athletics.

The following information is intended to raise awareness about CA-MRSA but is not intended to provide a comprehensive medical explanation. For additional information, access the resources listed at the end of the document or consult your family physician.

Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) is a type of staph infection that is resistant to certain antibiotics. There are two distinct types of MRSA. HA-MRSA ("hospital-acquired") occurs most frequently among people in hospitals and health care facilities who are older, more acutely ill, and have weakened immune systems. CA-MRSA ("community-acquired") has become responsible for most of the skin and soft tissue infections seen in healthy people during the past few years.

CA-MRSA infections generally start as small, painful red bumps that resemble pimples or boils. These quickly can turn into deep, painful abscesses that require surgical drainage. CA-MRSA produces toxins that cause a great deal of redness, pain, and inflammation. It can be readily spread among healthy people and has caused recurring infections in some patients as well as outbreaks in families, households, sports teams, and living units.

Main risk factors for CA-MRSA:

- **Young age.** CA-MRSA is much more common in younger persons.
- **Participating in contact sports.** CA-MRSA affects both amateur and professional sports teams. The bacteria easily spreads through cuts and abrasions and skin-to-skin contact.
- **Sharing towels or athletic equipment.** CA-MRSA has spread among athletes sharing razors, towels, uniforms, or equipment.
- **Living in crowded or unsanitary conditions.**

Awareness

Keep an eye on minor skin problems—pimples, insect bites, cuts, and scrapes—especially in children. If wounds become infected, tell the affected person and their family to see a doctor and have any skin infection cultured **before** starting antibiotic therapy. The wrong antibiotic can delay healing.

Preventing CA-MRSA

These common-sense precautions can help reduce the risk of contracting or spreading CA-MRSA. Remember that resistance to infection changes, so always take these precautions:

- **Wash your hands.** In or out of the hospital, careful hand washing remains the best defense against germs. Scrub hands briskly for at least 15 seconds, dry them with a disposable towel, and use another towel to turn off the faucet. Carry a small bottle of hand sanitizer containing at least 62 percent alcohol for times when you don't have access to soap and water.
- **Keep personal items personal.** Avoid sharing towels, sheets, razors, clothing, and athletic equipment, as MRSA spreads on contaminated objects as well.
- **Keep wounds covered.** Keep cuts and abrasions clean and covered with sterile, dry bandages until they heal. The pus from infected sores contains MRSA, and keeping wounds covered will help keep the bacteria from spreading. Dispose of contaminated bandages so others do not come in contact with them, such as in a plastic bag.
- **Wear disposable gloves.** Persons who expect to have contact with an infected wound should wear disposable gloves, and wash their hands before and after removing the gloves.
- **Sanitize linens.** If you have a cut or sore, wash towels and bed linens in hot water with added bleach, and dry in a hot dryer. Wash gym and athletic clothes after each wearing.
- **Clean potentially contaminated surfaces** with a disinfectant or bleach-water solution after caring for a wound.
- **Get tested.** If you have a skin infection that requires treatment, ask your doctor to get a culture to check for MRSA **first**. Many doctors prescribe drugs that aren't effective against antibiotic-resistant staph, which delays treatment.
- **Never** take anyone else's medication to treat any suspected infection you may have.

Please share this information with your colleagues, students, and families.

References on CA-MRSA Include:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_mrsa.html
- National Collegiate Athletic Association, <http://www.ncaa.org/wps/portal> Search: MRSA
- Mayo Clinic, <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/mrsa/DS00735>



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For more information or consultation, contact your local county or municipal health department or State Health Center, or call 1-877-PAHEALTH.