



## MRSA: What is it and how can you protect yourself?

There have been a lot of stories in the news about MRSA infections and you may be wondering, “what is MRSA?” MRSA is *methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus*. It is a type of staph bacteria that is resistant to some antibiotics. It can cause skin and other types of infections. Because MRSA is resistant to many antibiotics, infections from MRSA can be hard to treat. But, there is good news. You can take simple steps to help protect yourself from staph and MRSA infections.

### What are the signs of a staph infection?

Most skin infections caused by staph (including MRSA) start as a bump or infected area on the skin that may be:

- Red
- Swollen
- Painful
- Warm to the touch
- Full of pus
- Accompanied by a fever



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National MRSA Education Initiative

These skin infections can happen anywhere there is a cut, scrape, or broken skin. They are often found on areas of the body covered by hair. Common areas include: the back of the neck, groin, leg, buttock, armpit, or beard area of men.

### What if I think I have a MRSA skin infection?

If you think that you or someone in your family has a MRSA skin infection, cover the area with a bandage and call your health care practitioner. It's very important to call if anyone in your family has a skin infection and **a fever**. Your practitioner may drain the infection and prescribe antibiotics to treat the skin infection.

### How do you get MRSA?

Most infections caused by MRSA happen to people in hospitals and healthcare facilities (such as nursing homes and dialysis centers) who have weakened immune systems.

MRSA infections that affect people who are otherwise healthy are usually spread by:

- touching another person's infected sore
- touching surfaces or items that have MRSA germs on them
- sharing personal things such as towels, sports equipment, or razors that have touched infected skin



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## How can I protect myself from MRSA?

- Learn the signs of MRSA skin infections. Get treated quickly if you have these signs.
- Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage. Never touch an open wound without washing your hands first since this can spread germs.
- Wash your hands with soap and water often. Use an alcohol-based hand rub if you do not have soap and water.
- Do not share personal things. MRSA can spread when you share things like towels, washcloths, razors, sports equipment, and clothing. If you lend someone a personal thing like a towel, do not use it again until you have washed it in water using laundry detergent and dried it completely in the dryer.

## How do bacteria like MRSA become resistant to antibiotics?

Bacteria adapt to their environment so that they can survive. They do this naturally, but we can influence how they adapt through our actions. The more often a type of bacteria is exposed to a drug, the greater the chance that it will be able to adapt to the drug and that the drug will stop working against it. This is why we increase the risk that bacteria will become drug resistant when we use antibiotics incorrectly or use them when we do not need them.

## How can I help prevent drug resistance?

- Do not take an antibiotic unless it has been prescribed for you by your health care practitioner.
- When your practitioner prescribes an antibiotic:
  - Do not skip doses
  - Do not save any antibiotics for the next time you get sick
- Do not take someone else's antibiotics. They may not be right for you. Taking the wrong drug may mean you will not get the right treatment soon enough and may in fact make you sicker.

### To learn more about MRSA and drug resistance visit these websites:

- CDC MRSA website: [http://www.cdc.gov/mrsa/mrsa\\_initiative/skin\\_infection/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/mrsa/mrsa_initiative/skin_infection/index.html)
- CDC Drug Resistance website: <http://www.cdc.gov/drugresistance/>
- Alliance for the Prudent Use of Antibiotics: <http://www.tufts.edu/med/apua/Patients/patient.html>



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