



Human Services

Facts About

MRSA

(Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*)

*Staphylococcus aureus* is a group of bacteria. It is also called "staph".

Staph, like many other bacteria, can be found anywhere. People can have staph on their skin and in their nose and it doesn't make them sick. Staph, however, can cause illness if it enters the body through a cut or scrape in the skin. It can cause different illnesses that range from mild to severe. This is one reason it is so important to wash cuts or scrapes with mild soap and water—to prevent infection.

A form of staph developed that became resistant to some of the drugs (antibiotics) used to treat it. This form of "staph" is known as methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* or MRSA.

**HOW IT'S SPREAD**

MRSA can be spread through cuts or other openings in the skin:

- By close skin to skin contact
- On contaminated items and surfaces like towels and athletic equipment
- By poor hygiene
- In crowded living conditions

**WHO'S AT RISK**

Most MRSA infections are found in people with weakened immune systems who are in hospitals and other health care facilities like nursing homes and dialysis centers.

MRSA infections are becoming more common in people outside of healthcare facilities. Anyone can get infected with MRSA, however people who seem to be most affected are:

- children
- athletes
- military recruits
- prisoners

**SYMPTOMS**

Staph and MRSA infections can start out looking like a pimple or boil. It can be red, painful and swollen. Other symptoms may include:

- Drainage of fluid or pus
- Fever
- Warmth around the infected area

In addition to the symptoms above, signs of a more serious staph infection may include:

- Rash
- Shortness of breath
- Chills
- Chest pain
- Fatigue
- Muscle aches
- Headache
- General feeling of illness

**TREATMENT**

MRSA is usually a mild skin infection that can be treated successfully with proper skin care and **specific antibiotics prescribed by a doctor**. In rare cases, both MRSA and common staph infections can lead to serious bone or blood infections that become harder to treat. People should see a doctor if skin conditions worsen or wounds become infected. The doctor may have lab tests done depending on the symptoms and how severe they are.

**PREVENTION**

There are things you can do to help prevent MRSA infections.

**Clean cuts and scrapes with mild soap and water. Cover open sores** with sterile bandages until they heal. This will keep germs from getting into the sore and germs from the sore from spreading to others.

*(see back for more prevention information)*



# MRSA

## (Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*)

### MORE ABOUT PREVENTION

**Wash your hands** for 15-20 seconds with soap and water. Teach children how and when to wash hands. Wash hands after going to or visiting the hospital, a nursing home or other healthcare facility. Ask hospital and healthcare staff to wash their hands before touching you.

**Don't share personal items.** Each person should have their own washcloths, towels, sheets, razors, and clothes. MRSA can spread on contaminated objects and by direct contact.

**Keep athletic equipment and uniforms clean.** Wash uniforms after each use. Wipe down non-washable gear like head protectors with alcohol. Don't share athletic equipment or uniforms. Shower with soap and water after practices and games.

**Take antibiotics as prescribed.** If a doctor prescribes antibiotics it is very important to take all of the medication as it is prescribed—even if you start to feel better. Not finishing antibiotic treatment can cause the germ being treated to become resistant to the drug. That can make the infection harder to treat and the illness last longer.

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

[http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar\\_mrsa\\_ca\\_public.html](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_mrsa_ca_public.html)

Mayo Clinic

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/mrsa/DS00735>

National Library of Medicine

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/007261.htm>

Wake County Human Services  
Communicable Disease Program

P.O. Box 14049 10 Sunnybrook Road  
Raleigh, NC 27620-4049  
July 18, 2007

**Handwashing is one of the most important things a person can do to prevent the spread of many diseases!**

### How to Wash



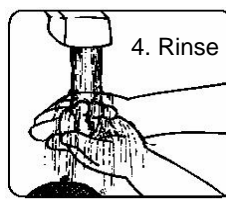
1. Wet



2. Soap



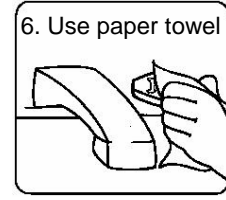
3. Scrub at least 15 seconds



4. Rinse



5. Dry



6. Use paper towel to turn off faucet.

### When to Wash

- Before handling food and food preparation items
- Before and after eating
- After using the bathroom, after changing a diaper, after helping a child use the bathroom
- After exposure to blood and other body fluids (blood, urine, feces, runny noses, vomit, etc.)
- After handling pets, after cleaning their cages or tanks
- After coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose, after wiping a child's nose
- After playing or working outside
- After handling trash
- Whenever hands look, feel or smell dirty