

# METHICILLIN-RESISTANT STAPHYLOCOCCUS AUREUS (MRSA)

## FACT SHEET

### What is MRSA?

*Staphylococcus aureus* (or Staph) are bacteria that are commonly found on skin surfaces of most people. These strains are resistant to common antibiotics such as penicillin, amoxicillin, and cephalosporins.

About 5% of people in the U.S. carry MRSA in their nose or on their skin. Most of these “carriers” do not know that they carry MRSA (this is not a rare condition).

### How is MRSA spread?

Most MRSA infections occur in people who have been in hospitals or other healthcare settings, such as nursing homes and dialysis centers. These infections may occur after surgery or having a medical device inserted.

Another type of MRSA infection can occur in the community — among healthy people. It is spread through contact with an infected wound or by sharing personal items, such as towels or razors that have touched infected skin. This type of MRSA infection often begins as a painful skin boil.

### What are the signs and symptoms of MRSA?

Staph skin infections, including MRSA, usually start as swollen, painful red bumps that might resemble pimples or spider bites. The affected area might be:

- Warm to the touch
- Full of pus or other drainage
- Accompanied by a fever.

These can quickly turn into deep, painful abscesses that require surgical draining. Sometimes the bacteria remain confined to the skin. They can also burrow deep into the body.

### Who is most at risk?

You are more at risk for healthcare-associated MRSA infections if you:

- were hospitalized
- regularly have hemodialysis
- have a weakened immune system
- live in a nursing care facility.

Groups at risk for community-acquired MRSA infections include:

- people who share exercise equipment, towels
- people who participate in contact sports
- childcare workers
- people who live in crowded or unclean conditions.

### What type of health problems are caused by MRSA?

Many common antibiotics are not effective against MRSA infections, so they are more difficult to treat. This can allow the infections to spread and sometimes become life-threatening.

MRSA infections may affect your bloodstream, lungs, heart, bones, and joints.

## How is MRSA diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will ask about your medical history and complete a physical examination. Samples will also be taken from the site of infection; from the wound or from sputum (a substance that is coughed up). Sometimes, a urine sample or a blood sample may be taken.

## How is MRSA treated?

MRSA for healthcare-associated infections and community-acquired infections are treated differently.

Healthcare-associated MRSA infections are usually treated with antibiotics through an intravenous (IV) injection. Community-acquired MRSA infections are usually treated with oral antibiotics. If you have a wound, your healthcare provider may puncture your wound and drain it to clean out the infection.

## How can MRSA be prevented?

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, or use alcohol-based hand sanitizer;
- Shower immediately after exercising;
- Cover all cuts and scrapes with a clean, dry bandage until healed;

- Don't share personal items that come into contact with bare skin, such as towels, razors, sheets and athletic equipment;
- Sanitize your linens. If you have cuts or broken skin, wash bed linens and towels in hot water with extra bleach and dry everything at high heat in the dryer. You should also wash your gym and athletic clothes after each use.

People with healthcare-associated MRSA are typically temporarily isolated from others until the infection improves. Isolation prevents the spread of this type of MRSA infection. Hospital personnel caring for people with MRSA should follow strict handwashing procedures.

To further reduce their risk for MRSA, hospital staff and visitors should wear protective garments and gloves to prevent contact with contaminated surfaces. Linens and contaminated surfaces should always be properly disinfected.

## Where can I get more information?

- Your personal healthcare provider
- [Centers for Disease Control & Prevention](#)
- [Utah Department of Health](#)

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