



Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcal Aureus* Infections or “MRSA”

Important Facts

- *Staphylococcal* often referred to simply as "staph," are bacteria commonly found in the environment, on people's skin and in their nose or nasal passages. Staph rarely becomes a medical threat.
- Staph can be passed on to others through person-to-person contact, through contact with contaminated surfaces, or as a result of wounds contaminated with dirt and debris.
- Some types of staph, such as methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcal aureus* or **MRSA**, are resistant to commonly used antibiotics and can cause severe infections that are especially difficult to treat.
- MRSA poses the most at risk for those who are very ill, have traumatic wounds, or are treated in intensive care units.
- Good personal hygiene, frequent hand washing and disinfection of medical treatment facilities are the best ways to avoid the spreading of MRSA and other germs.

What is the difference between "staph" and MRSA?

Some staph bacteria have become resistant to a number of the commonly used antibiotics, including methicillin. These bacteria are called methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, or MRSA. MRSA are resistant to all of the antibiotics in the penicillin family, but may respond to other classes of antibiotics. While 25% - 30% of the U.S. population are carriers of staph, only 1% are carriers of the more serious MRSA strain.



Some healthy people can carry MRSA and have no ill effects; however, they can still pass the bacteria to others usually by skin-to-skin contact

What is *Staphylococcus aureus* or “staph”?

Staphylococcus aureus, often referred to simply as "staph," are bacteria carried by many people on their skin or in their nose. Most staph bacteria cause minor skin infections, appearing as pimples and boils. They usually can be easily treated with penicillin or other commonly used antibiotics.



What kinds of situations are more likely to lead to staph infections?

- Sport activities: Skin-to-skin contact with someone who has a staph infection or is a carrier;
- Contact with items and surfaces that have staph on them, for example, sharing personal items such as razors and towels;
- Having open wounds, such as cuts or scrapes, that are not covered by bandages;
- Living in crowded living conditions;
- Having overall poor hygiene.

In addition to skin infections, staph bacteria sometimes cause infections in the blood, in the bones, and in the lungs, but these more severe infections are rare in otherwise healthy individuals.

Your Suggestions: http://deploymenthealthlibrary.fhp.osd.mil/product_feedback.jsp

Visit the Deployment Health and Family Readiness Library: <http://deploymenthealthlibrary.fhp.osd.mil>

A collaborative effort between the Air Force Institute for Operational Health, the Deployment Health Clinical Center, Force Health Protection and Readiness, the Navy Environmental Health Center, the U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine, and the OUSD(P&R)/Military Family and Community Policy



Who is more likely to get a MRSA infection?

Any of the situations that increase the risk of developing a staph infection can increase the risk of developing a MRSA infection. Circumstances increasing the likelihood of acquiring MRSA infections include:

- Using antibiotics recently or have for a long periods;
- Staying in a healthcare or nursing facility;
- If you are on kidney dialysis, or your immune system is not fully functioning;
- Are injected with drugs or medication intravenously (through your veins)

How are staph infections, including MRSA, treated?

Treatment for staph infections usually include the use of prescribed antibiotics. However, for some skin infections, a healthcare provider may simply drain the pus from the infection site. Only a few antibiotics are available to successfully treat MRSA infections. Doctors generally rely on the antibiotic Vancomycin to treat severe MRSA infections in hospitals. For other MRSA skin infections, doctors will first examine the infection and review the patient's medical history. If an antibiotic is needed, they will then prescribe a medication based on information known about the sensitivity of the bacteria to antibiotics.

If I have a staph infection, should I stay home from duty/work?

This is a decision you should discuss with your provider, however in many cases it is safe to return to work after treatment. If you do return to work, ensure that you do not infect your co-workers by covering your wound, practicing good personal hygiene, washing your hands frequently, not sharing personal items such as towels, and sanitizing all surfaces you contact frequently (desk surfaces, phone, etc).

How can I prevent a MRSA Infection?

Good hygiene is one of the best ways to prevent staph skin infections:

- Ensure all surfaces that come into contact with skin, such as exercise or athletic equipment, are cleaned regularly before and after each use.
- Keep hands clean by washing them thoroughly with soap and warm water or an alcohol-based sanitizer.
- Keep all cuts and abrasions clean and covered with a bandage until healed.
- Avoid contact with other people's wounds or material contaminated from wounds.
- Do not share personal items like towels, razors, or water bottles.
- Keep athletic wear/equipment freshly laundered.
- Shower with soap and hot water following participation in contact sports.

What is DoD doing to prevent MRSA infections?

Like civilian hospitals in the United States, the hospitals and clinics of the Department of Defense (DoD) have for many years worked to prevent and control hospital-acquired infections in their patients. All DoD hospitals have received an official stamp of approval for the effectiveness of their infection control programs through accreditation by the Joint Commission the nation's predominant standards-setting and accrediting body in health care.

The Services' preventive medicine units have increased their efforts to prevent hospital, clinic, and community colonization and transmission of MRSA and other bacterial infections as well as viral infections among our Service members. These efforts include emphasizing hand washing and personal hygiene at basic and advanced training sites along with increased availability and use of alcohol-based antimicrobial hand gels to reduce bacteria on hands.

Where Do I Get More Information?

DoD Deployment Health Clinical Center (DHCC)

Phone: (866) 559-1627
<http://www.pdhealth.mil/>

U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine (USACHPPM)

Phone: (800) 222-9698
<http://chppm-www.apgea.army.mil>

Air Force Institute for Operational Health (AFIOH)

Phone: (888) 232-3764
<http://www.brooks.af.mil/afioh/>

DoD Force Health Protection and Readiness (FHP&R)

Phone: (800) 497-6261
<https://fhp.osd.mil>

Navy Environmental Health Center (NEHC)

Phone: (757) 953-0700
<http://www-nehc.med.navy.mil>

Walter Reed Army Medical Center

Phone: (202) 782-3501
<http://www.wramc.army.mil>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Community-Associated Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus aureus

http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_mrsa_ca.html



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