

Methicillin Resistant Staph Aureus (MRSA)

What is staphylococcus aureus?

Staphylococcus aureus, often referred to simply as “staph”, are bacteria commonly carried on the skin or nose of healthy people. Approximately 25 to 30% of the population is colonized (when bacteria are present, but not causing an infection) is the nose with staph bacteria. Sometimes, staph can cause an infection. Staph bacteria are one of the most common causes of skin infections in the United States. Most of the infections are mild and can be treated without antibiotics. However, staph bacteria also can cause serious infections (such as surgical wound infections, bloodstream infections, and pneumonia).

What is MRSA?

Some staph bacteria are resistant to antibiotics. Methicillin Resistant Staph Aureus (MRSA) is a type of staph that is resistant to certain antibiotics (most commonly these are penicillin and amoxicillin). While 25 to 30% of the population is colonized with staph, approximately 1% is colonized with MRSA.

Who gets staph or MRSA infections?

Staph infections, including MRSA, occur most frequently among persons in hospitals and healthcare facilities who have weakened immune systems. These healthcare-associated infections include surgical wound infections, urinary tract infections, bloodstream infections, and pneumonia.

How common are staph and MRSA infections?

Staph bacteria are one of the most common causes of skin infections in the United States and are a common cause of pneumonia, surgical wound infections, and bloodstream infections. The majority of MRSA infections occur among patients in hospitals or other health care settings; however, it is becoming more common in the community setting.

What does a staph or MRSA infection look like?

Staph bacteria, including MRSA, can cause skin infections that may look like a pimple or boil and can be red, swollen, painful, or have pus or other drainage. Some people describe the initial area as a “spider bite”. More serious infections may cause pneumonia, bloodstream infections, or surgical wound infections.


Are certain people at increased risk for MRSA skin infection?

Factors that have been associated with the spread of MRSA skin infections include: close skin-to-skin contact, openings in the skin such as cuts or abrasions, contaminated items and surfaces, crowded living conditions, and poor hygiene.

How can I prevent staph or MRSA skin infection?

Practice good hygiene:

1. Keep your hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
2. Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healed.
3. Avoid contact with other's people's wounds or bandages.
4. Avoid sharing personal items such as towels or razors.



Can I get MRSA at my gym or health club?

In the outbreaks of MRSA, the environment has not played a significant role in the transmission of MRSA. MRSA is transmitted most frequently by **direct** skin-to-skin contact. You can protect yourself from infections by practicing good hygiene (e.g., keeping your hands clean by washing with soap and water or using alcohol-based hand rub and showering after working out); covering any open skin area such as abrasions or cuts with a dry clean bandage; avoiding sharing personal items such as towels or razors; using a barrier (e.g., clothing or a towel) between your skin and shared equipment; and wiping surfaces of equipment before and after use.

What should I do if I think I have a staph or MRSA infection?

See your healthcare provider.

Are staph and MRSA infections treatable?

Yes. Most staph and MRSA infections are treatable with antibiotics. If you are given an antibiotic, take all of the doses, even if the infection is getting better, unless your health care provider tells you to stop taking it. Do not share antibiotics with others or save unfinished antibiotics to use at another time.

Staph skin infections may also need to be treated by draining the abscess or boil and may not require antibiotics. Drainage of skin boils or abscesses should only be done by a healthcare provider.

If after visiting your healthcare provider the infection is not getting better after a few days, contact them again. If other people you know or live with get the same infection tell them to go to their healthcare provider.

Has Skidmore had cases of MRSA?

Health Services has seen a very limited number of MRSA in the past several years. There are currently no active infections that we are aware of. For students with suspicious lesions, we are obtaining cultures to help identify the causative organism and providing the appropriate treatment for positive cultures. We have also been in contact with the Public Health Department and have been diligent in our monitoring of the situation. If there were to be a MRSA outbreak on campus, we would inform the Skidmore community and take the appropriate next steps in conjunction with the Public Health Department.