

## Have you been diagnosed with a *Staphylococcus aureus* or MRSA infection?

Below are answers to some common questions...

### What is *Staphylococcus aureus* or Staph?

Staph is a type of bacteria. It may cause skin infections that look like pimples or boils. Skin infections caused by Staph may be red, swollen, painful, or have pus or other drainage. Some Staph (known as Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* or MRSA) are resistant to certain antibiotics, making it harder to treat. The information on this page applies to both Staph and MRSA.

### Who gets Staph infections?

Anyone can get a Staph infection. People are more likely to get a Staph infection if they have:

- Skin-to-skin contact with someone who has a Staph infection
- Contact with items and surfaces that have Staph on them
- Openings in their skin such as cuts or scrapes
- Crowded living conditions
- Poor hygiene

### How serious are Staph infections?

Most Staph skin infections are minor and may be easily treated. Staph also may cause more serious infections, such as infections of the bloodstream, surgical sites, or pneumonia. Sometimes, a Staph infection that starts as a skin infection may worsen. It is important to contact your doctor if your infection does not get better.

### How are Staph infections treated?

Treatment for a Staph skin infection may include taking an antibiotic or having a doctor drain the infection. If you are given an antibiotic, be sure to take all of the doses, even if the infection is getting better, unless your doctor tells you to stop taking it. Do not share antibiotics with other people or save them to use later.

### How do I keep Staph infections from spreading?

- Wash your hands often or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer
- Keep your cuts and scrapes clean and cover them with bandages
- Do not touch other people's cuts or bandages
- Do not share personal items like towels or razors

If you have any questions about your condition, please ask your doctor.

For more information, please visit: [http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar\\_mrsa.html](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_mrsa.html).



# **Questions and Answers about Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) in Schools**

Answers to commonly asked questions about preventing the spread of methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus skin infections.

Centers for Disease Control (CDC), along with parents and school officials, wants to do everything possible to protect students from MRSA skin infections. These are commonly asked questions that will help parents and school officials prevent the spread of MRSA in schools.

## ***What type of infections does MRSA cause?***

- In the community most MRSA infections are skin infections that may appear as pustules or boils which often are red, swollen, painful, or have pus or other drainage. These skin infections commonly occur at sites of visible skin trauma, such as cuts and abrasions, and areas of the body covered by hair (e.g., back of neck, groin, buttock, armpit, beard area of men).
- Almost all MRSA skin infections can be effectively treated by drainage of pus with or without antibiotics. More serious infections, such as pneumonia, bloodstream infections, or bone infections, are very rare in healthy people who get MRSA skin infections.

## ***How is MRSA transmitted?***

- MRSA is usually transmitted by direct skin-to-skin contact or contact with shared items or surfaces that have come into contact with someone else's infection (e.g., towels, used bandages).

## ***In what settings do MRSA skin infections occur?***

- MRSA skin infections can occur anywhere.
- Some settings have factors that make it easier for MRSA to be transmitted.
- These factors, referred to as the 5 C's, are as follows: Crowding, frequent skin-to-skin Contact, Compromised skin (i.e., cuts or abrasions), Contaminated items and surfaces, and lack of Cleanliness.
- Locations where the 5 C's are common include schools, dormitories, military barracks, households, correctional facilities, and daycare centers.

## ***How do I protect myself from getting MRSA?***

You can protect yourself from getting MRSA by:

- practicing good hygiene (e.g., keeping your hands clean by washing with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer and showering immediately after participating in exercise);
- covering skin trauma such as abrasions or cuts with a clean dry bandage until healed;
- avoiding sharing personal items (e.g., towels, razors) that come into contact with your bare skin; and using a barrier (e.g., clothing or a towel) between your skin and shared equipment such as weight-training benches;
- maintaining a clean environment by establishing cleaning procedures for frequently touched surfaces and surfaces that come into direct contact with people's skin.

## ***Should schools close because of an MRSA infection?***

- The decision to close a school for any communicable disease should be made by school officials in consultation with local and/or state public health officials. However, in most cases, it is not necessary to close schools because of an MRSA infection in a student. It is important to note that MRSA transmission can be prevented by simple measures such as hand hygiene and covering infections.

## ***Should the school be closed to be cleaned or disinfected when an MRSA infection occurs?***

- Covering infections will greatly reduce the risks of surfaces becoming contaminated with MRSA. In general it is not necessary to close schools to "disinfect" them when MRSA infections occur. MRSA skin infections are transmitted primarily by skin-to-skin contact and contact with surfaces that have come into contact with someone else's infection.

- When MRSA skin infections occur, cleaning and disinfection should be performed on surfaces that are likely to contact uncovered or poorly covered infections.
- Cleaning surfaces with detergent-based cleaners or Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered disinfectants is effective at removing MRSA from the environment.
- It is important to read the instruction labels on all cleaners to make sure they are used safely and appropriately.
- Environmental cleaners and disinfectants should not be used to treat infections.
- The EPA provides a list of EPA-registered products effective against MRSA: <http://epa.gov/op-pad001/chemregindex.htm>

***Should the entire school community be notified of every MRSA infection?***

- Usually, it should not be necessary to inform the entire school community about a single MRSA infection. When an MRSA infection occurs within the school population, the school nurse and school physician should determine, based on their medical judgment, whether some or all students, parents and staff should be notified. Consultation with the local public health authorities should be used to guide this decision.
- Remember that staphylococcus (staph) bacteria, including MRSA, have been and remain a common cause of skin infections.

***Should the school be notified that my child has an MRSA infection?***

- Consult with your school about its policy for notification of skin infections.

***Should students with MRSA skin infections be excluded from attending school?***

- Unless directed by a physician, students with MRSA infections should not be excluded from attending school.
- Exclusion from school and sports activities should be reserved for those with wound drainage (“pus”) that cannot be covered and contained with a clean, dry bandage and for those who cannot maintain good personal hygiene.

***I have an MRSA skin infection. How do I prevent spreading it to others?***

- Cover your wound. Keep wounds that are draining or have pus covered with clean, dry bandages until healed. Follow your healthcare provider’s instructions on proper care of the wound. Pus from infected wounds can contain staph, including MRSA, so keeping the infection covered will help prevent the spread to others. Bandages and tape can be discarded with the regular trash.
- Clean your hands frequently. You, your family, and others in close contact should wash their hands frequently with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, especially after changing the bandage or touching the infected wound.
- Do not share personal items. Avoid sharing personal items, such as towels, washcloths, razors, clothing, or uniforms, that may have had contact with the infected wound or bandage. Wash sheets, towels, and clothes that become soiled with water and laundry detergent. Use a dryer to dry clothes completely.

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Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1600 Clifton Rd, Atlanta, GA 30333, U.S.A.  
Switchboard: (404) 639-3311 / CDC Contact Center: 800-CDC-INFO / 888-232-6348 (TTY)