

Staphylococcus aureus/MRSA Fact Sheet

Staphylococcus aureus or “Staph” is a type of bacteria.

“Staph” is carried on the skin of healthy individuals and sometimes in the environment. It may cause skin infections that look like pimples or boils, which can be red, swollen, painful, or have pus or other drainage. Some staph bacteria (known as Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus aureus or MRSA) are resistant to certain antibiotics, sometimes making this type of bacteria harder to treat. The information on this page applies to both Staph and MRSA.

Anyone can get Staph or MRSA infections.

Many of us (30-50%) periodically have Staph living on our skin and have no symptoms or illness at all. This is called being “colonized”. Sometimes, though, Staph bacteria can enter the body through a break in the skin, a cut, or an abrasion and then cause an infection. MRSA skin infections are transmitted primarily by skin-to-skin contact and contact with surfaces that have come into contact with someone else’s wound drainage. Most of these skin infections are minor (such as pimples and boils) however; Staph bacteria can cause serious infections (such as surgical wound infections, bloodstream infections, and pneumonia).

Infections can be prevented by:

- Practicing good hygiene (keeping hands clean by washing with soap and water or using alcohol based hand sanitizer and showering immediately after playing team sports or using shared gym equipment)
- Keeping cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healed
- Avoiding contact with other people’s wounds or bandage
- Maintaining a clean environment by cleaning frequently touched surfaces

See your doctor if you think you have a Staph or MRSA infection

Staph and MRSA infections are treatable

Most Staph infections, including MRSA infections are treatable with antibiotics. However, many Staph skin infections, including MRSA skin infections, may be treated without antibiotics by measures such as draining the abscess or boil. 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. It is possible to have a Staph or MRSA skin infection come back (recur) after it is cured. To prevent this from happening, follow your healthcare provider’s directions while you have the infection, and follow the prevention steps after the infection is gone.

People with MRSA infections generally do not need to be excluded from attending school or work

Exclusion from work, 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 are unable to contain their secretions. In general, it is not necessary to close schools to “disinfect” them when MRSA infections occur.