



MRSA and the Workplace

Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA) refers to types of staph that are resistant to a type of antibiotic, methicillin. MRSA is often resistant to other antibiotics as well. While 25% to 30% of the population is colonized with staph (meaning that bacteria are present, but not causing an infection with staph), approximately 1% is colonized with MRSA.

Signs, Symptoms and Risks of MRSA

Staph is commonly carried on the skin or in the nose of healthy people and can sometimes cause infection. Although the infection may start as a minor skin sore, it can become serious, sometimes even fatal. Staph skin infections, including MRSA, usually start as a bump on the skin that may be red, warm, swollen, full of pus or painful. They may look like a pimple, a boil or a spider bite. MRSA usually spreads by touching infected skin. It can also spread by touching materials or surfaces that had contact with an infection (e.g., towels, clothing, faucets, door knobs).

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Where MRSA is Spread

Staph infections, including MRSA, occur most frequently among persons in hospitals and health care facilities (such as long-term care facilities and dialysis centers) who have weakened immune systems. These health care-associated staph infections include surgical wound infections, urinary tract infections, bloodstream infections and pneumonia. Staph and MRSA can also cause illness in persons outside of hospitals and health care facilities. MRSA infections that are acquired by persons who have not been recently (within the past year) hospitalized or had a medical procedure (such as dialysis, surgery, catheters, etc.) are known as community-associated MRSA infections.

Certain factors make it easier for MRSA to spread, sometimes referred to as the 5 Cs:

- Crowding
- Frequent skin-to-skin Contact
- Compromised skin (cut, scrape or rash)
- Contaminated items and surfaces
- Lack of Cleanliness

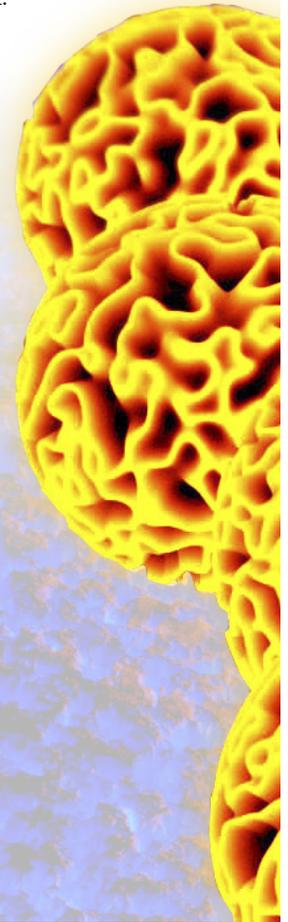
Workplaces where the 5 Cs are common, outside of health care settings, include schools and daycare facilities, dormitories, military barracks and correctional facilities. People who work with farm animals or pets may also be at risk of MRSA infections from animals.

Work Restrictions

It is safe to work with someone who has a staph or MRSA infection, as long as their wound is kept clean, dry and covered. Those who should be restricted include:

- Workers with wound drainage (pus) that cannot be covered and contained with a clean, dry bandage or who cannot maintain good hygiene practices, until the infection has healed.
- Workers with active infections from activities where it is likely that others will contact the affected skin, until the infection has healed.
- Food handlers with a lesion containing pus (such as a boil) or infected wound that is open and draining, unless it is covered in accordance with the FDA's 2009 Food Code.

Unless a healthcare provider says not to, most people with MRSA infections can go to work.



Tips to Prevent the Spread of MRSA

- Show employees you care about worker safety and health protection in the workplace by promoting a culture of safety.
- Ensure the availability of washrooms and handwashing supplies.
- Encourage workers to practice good hand hygiene.
- Ensure the performance of routine workplace housekeeping.
- Ensure that surfaces contaminated with MRSA drainage or blood are cleaned and disinfected.
- Ensure the availability of personal protective equipment and first aid supplies.

Disinfecting Contaminated Surfaces and Materials

See www.cdc.gov/mrsa/environment for information on environmental cleaning and disinfecting for MRSA. Cleaners and disinfectants can be irritating and associated with health issues such as asthma or skin problems, so it is important to follow label instructions and use them safely.

MRSA can be spread on contaminated items, such as clothing, uniforms, sheets and towels. Follow these tips to reduce or eliminate exposure:

- Wear gloves when handling potentially contaminated laundry. Wash your hands after removing the gloves.
- Launder items in a washing machine with laundry detergent. Use the warmest water recommended on detergent and clothing labels. Hot water helps kill MRSA.
- Do not pack items tightly in the washing machine. They may not get clean, and MRSA may not be removed.
- Machine dry completely. A dryer helps kill MRSA. Air drying may not kill the bacteria.
- Dealing with MRSA

Skin Infections

If you suspect you have a MRSA skin infection, cover the area with a bandage and contact your health care provider. This is especially important if you have a fever as well as signs and symptoms of an MRSA skin infection. Do not touch the sore or the pus and do not try to drain the pus yourself. This can make your infection worse or spread it to others. Your health care provider may drain the infection and prescribe an antibiotic. If you are given an antibiotic, take all the doses, even if the infection is getting better. Taking less than the full dose can make the remaining bacteria more resistant to antibiotics.

To prevent staph or MRSA skin infections, do the following:

- Wash your hands frequently.
- Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer when washing is not possible.
- Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered.
- Avoid sharing personal items such as uniforms, towels or razors.
- Wear gloves or other personal protective equipment as appropriate.

For more information on MRSA, see <http://www.cdc.gov/mrsa/index.html>.

United Heartland is committed to providing and directing our customers to helpful resources regarding exposures to infectious diseases and bloodborne pathogens. For questions or more information, contact us at 800-258-2667.

