

## **About...Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA)**

### **What is *Staphylococcus aureus*?**

*Staphylococcus aureus* (staph) bacteria are commonly found on the skin (armpit, groin, and genital areas) and in the nose of many people and normally do not cause illness. However, when these bacteria enter the body through a break in the skin, they can cause small infections such as pimples and boils. Staph can also cause serious infections such as bloodstream infections, pneumonia, or surgical wound infections. Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) is a type of staph bacteria that is resistant to the antibiotic methicillin and other antibiotics related to penicillin.

### **How is MRSA spread?**

MRSA is spread by close contact with an infected person, either by direct skin contact or indirect contact with shared objects or surfaces, such as shared towels, razors, soap, wound bandages, bedding, clothes, hot tub or sauna benches, and athletic equipment. Wound drainage or pus is very infectious.

### **Who is at risk for MRSA?**

Your risk is higher if you:

- Have recurrent skin infections or open skin areas (e.g., abrasions or cuts)
- Have contact with someone who is infected with MRSA
- Have a weakened immune system due to illness or kidney dialysis
- Are an injection drug user
- Had recent antibiotic use
- Live in crowded conditions
- Play in close-contact sports
- Are a man who has sex with men
- Have been a patient in a health care facility within the past year
- Have poor personal hygiene

### **How do I know if I have MRSA?**

See your health care provider. Your health care provider may collect a sample from the infected area and send it to a laboratory. Your health care provider can then prescribe an antibiotic that is right for you.

Symptoms of MRSA infection may include:

- Red, swollen, warm, and painful pimple, boil, or blistered areas
- Pus or other drainage
- Fever and chills
- A wound that looks like a spider bite

### **How can MRSA be treated?**

Seeing your health care provider early on will prevent the infection from becoming worse. If your health care provider prescribes an antibiotic, take it exactly as directed and be sure to finish all doses. (See Quick Facts [about Antibiotic Use and Antibiotic Resistance.](#))

### **How is MRSA prevented?**

- Wash your hands properly and often. (See Quick Facts [about Hand Washing.](#))
- Keep infected areas covered with a clean, dry bandage.
- Avoid direct contact with another person's wound, drainage, or bandages.
- Avoid contact with surfaces contaminated with wound drainage.
- Do not share personal hygiene items, such as washcloths, towels, razors, toothbrushes, soap, nail clippers, clothing, or uniforms.
- Clean shared athletic equipment and surfaces before use.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to:  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,  
[http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar\\_mrsa.html](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_mrsa.html)

This page was last reviewed March 26, 2007.

