

Frequently Asked Questions about...

Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA)

Q. What is Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA)?

A. Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, or “MRSA”, is a type of *Staphylococcus* bacteria that is resistant to certain types of antibiotics, such as methicillin or oxacillin.

Q. Where is MRSA found?

A. *Staphylococci* bacteria are common and can be found on the skin of normal, healthy people. Methicillin-resistant strains of *Staphylococci* can be found in the community and may be present in healthcare or residential settings.

Q. What are the symptoms of MRSA infection?

A. It is possible to carry MRSA but not show any symptoms; this is called colonization. Symptoms of MRSA infection will depend on the site of the infection. Skin infections may appear as red boils or pimples that may be painful and slow to heal. Infections in other areas of the body such as bones, blood, or organs, may present with symptoms such as fever and pain at the site of infection.

Q. How does someone catch MRSA?

A. MRSA can be transmitted through direct person-to-person contact, usually via the hands. MRSA can survive in the environment, so it is also possible to acquire MRSA from objects like towels and bed sheets or other surfaces like bed rails, door knobs, or wheelchairs.

Q. Why may assisted living facility (ALF) or nursing home (NH) residents be at risk for contracting MRSA?

A. Risk factors for acquiring a MRSA infection include hospital stays, frequent antibiotic use, and chronic underlying medical conditions that weaken the immune system and make it easier for MRSA to infect an individual. Many ALF or NH residents fall into one of these risk factor categories and thus are at increased risk for contracting MRSA infections.

Q. Can MRSA be treated?

A. Yes, it is possible to treat MRSA infections. Often, minor skin infections can be treated by draining and cleaning the affected wound. MRSA infections in other areas of the body can be treated with antibiotics that are powerful enough to eliminate the infection.

Q. What is the best way to prevent the spread of MRSA?

A. The best way to prevent MRSA is through frequent and thorough hand washing. Alcohol based hand sanitizers are also effective. Regular environmental cleaning with an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered disinfectant is also important. More information on environmental cleaning is available at www.epa.gov and elsewhere in this infection prevention toolkit. Individuals with MRSA infections on their skin should keep their wounds covered and well cleaned and avoid sharing personal objects such as razors and towels with other individuals to limit the spread of infection.

Contact your local health department if you have additional questions about MRSA