

MRSA **(Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*)**

Staphylococcus aureus, often called “staph”, is a common type of bacteria that can be found in the nose and on the skin of about one out of every three people. Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, also called MRSA, are staph that are not killed by many of the antibiotics doctors used to prescribe most commonly for staph infections. Until the mid-1990s, MRSA mainly affected patients in hospitals and other healthcare settings. Since that time, a new strain of MRSA has emerged. This new strain is called community-associated MRSA, and has rapidly become one of the most common causes of skin and soft tissue infections among otherwise healthy people in the community.

Many people carry MRSA on their skin, and most will never get sick from it. Skin infections occur when the bacteria get in through small scrapes or cuts, sometimes too small to notice. The infected area usually begins with a red bump that resembles a pimple or insect bite. If untreated, the lesion may become hard and painful or may drain pus (often called a “boil” or a skin abscess). Unlike hospital-associated MRSA, most community-associated MRSA infections can be treated with several types of antibiotics, including some that can be taken by mouth. Not all MRSA skin infections require antibiotics; treatment decisions should be made by a doctor or other licensed healthcare provider. Occasionally, community-associated MRSA can cause blood stream infections, joint infections, pneumonia, or other severe infections in an otherwise well person.

MRSA is most often spread through direct physical contact with an infected person. Draining lesions are highly infectious and represent an important source of spread. MRSA can also be spread by touching objects that have been soiled with drainage from an infected wound- e.g., bandages, towels, or athletic equipment- although this is less common than direct person-to-person spread. Outbreaks of MRSA have occurred within households, on sports teams, in prisons, in daycare centers, and in other settings where people have close contact or share equipment and personal items.

To prevent MRSA skin infections, practice good hygiene:

- Keep your hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Wash any cut or break in the skin with soap and water and apply a clean bandage daily.
- Avoid contact with other people’s wounds or bandages.
- Avoid sharing personal items such as towels or razors.

If you have symptoms of MRSA, see your doctor:

- Keep draining wounds clean and covered.
- Wash your hands and forearms before and after caring for the wound and frequently throughout the day. Use soap and warm water for 15 seconds and dry your hands on a clean towel or paper towel.
- Take all antibiotics as prescribed
- Report new skin sores or boils to your doctor immediately.

For more information:

- [NC Public Health Management of MRSA](#)
- MRSA in Specific Settings
 1. [Athletic Teams](#)
 2. [Schools](#)
 3. [Incarcerated Populations/Correctional Facilities](#)
 4. [Child Care Facilities](#)
 5. [Food Service Establishment](#)
 6. [Other Specific Settings](#)
- [Resources](#)