

**M**ethicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) is a bacterial skin infection that is acquired and easily spread in community settings e.g., hospitals, daycare and schools, athletic facilities, crowded living quarters, and anywhere people gather. MRSA is a strain of the common *Staph aureus* bacteria which is resistant to antibiotics used in the past.

The CDC states that 5% of patients in US hospitals have MRSA bacteria in their nose or on their skin. Although many people carry MRSA, most people do not develop serious infections. For those that do develop infection, there are several antibiotics that are very effective against MRSA. MRSA can be treated and the infection resolved.

## HOW IS MRSA TRANSMITTED?

MRSA is spread through contact with an infected person or with items that are contaminated with the bacteria. You can acquire MRSA by sharing towels, razors, and other personal items that were used by an infected person. This and other community-acquired skin and soft tissue infections are on the rise.

## WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

MRSA skin infections may be similar in appearance to a spider bite. An infection with MRSA cannot be diagnosed without a lab test because other bacterial infections may look similar. Signs and symptoms to look for include a bump or infected area of the skin that is:

- Red
- Painful
- Full of pus or other drainage
- Swollen
- Warm to the touch
- Accompanied by a fever

## WHO IS AT INCREASED RISK OF CONTRACTING A MRSA INFECTION?

Older people, those with weakened immune systems, and those who do not have access to proper hygiene are at risk. MRSA is increasing among injection drug users.



## WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Wash your hands often, especially when you are in close quarters, using soap and water. Scrub for at least twenty seconds.
- DO NOT share personal items.
- Cover wounds and non-intact skin with bandages.
- Seek medical attention if you suspect you may be infected.
- Wear nitrile or vinyl gloves when performing tasks which require close contact with the general public. Wash your hands after removing gloves.
- Contact [biosafety@usc.edu](mailto:biosafety@usc.edu) or (323) 442-2000 for more information.

## HOW CAN A MRSA INFECTION BE PREVENTED OR TREATED?

The risk of MRSA infection can be reduced by using proper hygiene such as handwashing, covering wounds with bandages, and not sharing personal items such as razors, clothing, washcloths, and towels. There are antibiotics which treat and clear MRSA infections. Visit your physician for analysis and treatment if you suspect you are infected.

## WHAT DISINFECTANTS CAN BE USED ON SURFACES SUSPECTED OF THE PRESENCE OF MRSA?

Check the label of any disinfectant to see if it is effective against MRSA. A 1:100 dilution of normal household bleach is effective and should be freshly made. However, bleach is irritating to skin and should be used with caution. Wear gloves and eye protection. Apply the solution to areas that have already been cleaned of debris. Never apply bleach to skin.

## RESOURCES

[USC Student Health](#)

US National Library of Medicine - [MRSA](#)

Mayo Clinic - [MRSA Infection](#)

CDC - [Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus \(MRSA\)](#)

