HELPFUL REMINDERS ABOUT MRSA INFECTION

Information for Patients

MRSA is a kind of *Staphylococcus aureus* ("staph") bacteria that is resistant to some kinds of antibiotics. Staph are bacteria commonly carried on the skin or in the nose of healthy people. Sometimes, staph can cause an infection, especially pimples, boils and other problems with the skin. These infections often contain pus, and may feel itchy and warm. Occasionally, staph cause more serious infections. When appropriately identified, staph and MRSA infections can be treated successfully.

MRSA is a kind of *Staphylococcus aureus* ("staph") bacteria that is resistant to some kinds of antibiotics.

How are staph spread?

Staph, including MRSA, are spread by direct skin-to-skin contact, such as shaking hands, wrestling, or other direct contact with the skin of another person. Staph are also spread by contact with items that have been touched by people with staph, like towels shared after bathing and drying off, or shared athletic equipment in the gym or on the field.

Staph infections start when staph get into a cut, scrape or other break in the skin. If you have a skin infection—painful, swollen pimples, boils, and rashes, for example— you should be very careful to avoid spreading your infection to others.

If I have a MRSA skin infection, how will it be treated?

Most MRSA infections are treated by good wound and skin care: keeping the area clean and dry, washing your hands after caring for the area, carefully disposing of any bandages, and allowing your body to heal.

Sometimes treatment requires the use of antibiotics. If antibiotics are needed, it is important to use the medication as directed unless your doctor tells you to stop. If the infection has not improved within a few days after seeing your doctor, contact your doctor again.

How should I take care of a MRSA infection at home?

- Keep your wound covered with clean, dry bandages. This is especially important when the wound is draining.
- After touching infected skin and bandages, wash your hands with soap and warm water for at least 15-30 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand rub or gel.
- Put your dressings, bandages and other disposable waste in a separate trash bag and close the bag tightly before throwing it out with the regular garbage.
- Consider using clean, disposable, nonsterile gloves to change bandages. Throw gloves out after you use them.
- Follow your healthcare provider's instructions. Contact your provider if you have any questions about caring for a MRSA infection at home.

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If I have a MRSA skin infection, what can I do to prevent others from getting infected?

1. **Cover your wound.** Keep wounds that are draining or have pus covered with clean, dry bandages. Follow your healthcare provider's instructions on proper care of the wound. Pus from infected wounds can contain staph and MRSA or other bacteria, so keeping the infection covered will help prevent the spread to others.
2. **Wash your hands.** You, your family, and others in close contact should wash their hands frequently with soap and warm water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, especially after changing the bandage or touching the infected wound.
3. **Do not share personal items.** Avoid sharing personal items such as towels, washcloths, razors, clothing, or athletic uniforms that may have had contact with the infected wound or bandage.
4. **Wash sheets, towels, and clothes** that become soiled with hot water and laundry detergent. Drying clothes in a hot dryer, rather than air-drying, also helps kill bacteria.
5. **Make sure your wound is covered** if you participate in contact sports or other skin-to-skin contact.
6. **Keep counter tops, tubs and sinks clean.** Clean bathroom counters, sinks, tubs and toilets frequently, as well as any other household surfaces that come into direct contact with your wound, your wound drainage, or your hands after you have tended to your infection.
7. **Talk to your healthcare providers.** While you are healing, tell any other healthcare providers who treat you that you have a MRSA skin infection. In the future, tell your healthcare providers that you have had a MRSA infection.
8. **If you are in a hospital and have a MRSA infection,** your providers may take additional measures to prevent others from becoming infected.

Regular handwashing is the best way to prevent getting and spreading MRSA.

How can I prevent a MRSA infection in the first place?

- Regular handwashing is the best way to prevent getting and spreading MRSA. Keep your hands clean by washing them frequently with soap and warm water or hand sanitizer, and especially after direct contact with another person's skin.
- Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until they have healed.
- Avoid contact with other people's wounds or bandages.
- Avoid sharing personal items such as towels, washcloths, toothbrushes, and razors. Sharing these items may transfer MRSA from one person to another.
- Keep your skin healthy, and avoid getting dry, cracked skin, especially during the winter. Healthy skin helps to keep the MRSA on the surface of your skin from causing an infection underneath your skin.
- Contact your doctor if you have a skin infection that does not improve.

For more information about MRSA, visit the MDPH website at www.mass.gov/dph

Massachusetts Department of Public Health
October 2006