

MRSA

What parents need to know

What is MRSA?

Staphylococcus aureus, commonly referred to as “staph” is a bacterium naturally carried on the skin and in the nose of about 1/3 of the population. Typically harmless, these bacteria can enter the body, usually through a cut or wound, and cause infection. When staph cannot be treated with the antibiotic ‘methicillin,’ it is called methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA). This antibiotic resistance has developed from antibiotic overuse and misuse and makes MRSA more difficult to treat than non-resistant staph.

Symptoms of MRSA

Most MRSA infections in the community begin as painful skin boils that often look like spider bites or pimples. These are usually red, swollen, or filled with pus. These bumps often appear at creases in the body (armpits, buttocks), near cuts or skin wounds, or on areas of the body covered by hair. They may feel warm to the touch. MRSA can infect the bloodstream, bones, urinary tract or lungs and result in pneumonia or life-threatening illness. If you suspect your child has a staph infection, make an appointment with your primary care provider.

How MRSA is spread

Skin-to-skin contact can easily spread staph infections, particularly contact with secretions from open wounds. It is important to keep any draining wounds covered with a dry bandage. When changing your child’s bandages, use gloves and wash your hands with soap and warm water afterwards.

Contaminated surfaces and personal items such as towels, jerseys, clothing, or razors may also transmit infection and should not be shared. Athletes may be at a higher risk of infection and should practice good personal hygiene (i.e. showering after practice). Wet or soiled clothing should not be stored in lockers. Hands should be washed after using communal equipment. Infected individuals should not use swimming pools until all wounds are completely healed.

Caring for infected or exposed students

Encourage infected children to avoid contact with others, even when wounds are bandaged. Discourage sharing of lotions, lip gloss, drinks, or other personal items in the classroom. Clean shared surfaces daily with a general disinfectant. Promote frequent hand washing with soap and warm water.

Cleaning & Disinfecting

Contaminated clothing, towels, etc should be washed using hot water and detergent and dried in a hot dryer (not air-dried). Children and families should wash their hands with soap and warm water frequently, especially after changing bandages. An EPA-approved disinfectant or solution containing 1-part bleach to 10 - parts water can be used to clean contaminated surfaces.

Prevention Tips

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| Cover open wounds | Cover all wounds with a dry bandage, taped on all four sides. Children and adolescents with draining wounds should be excluded from contact sports until draining has stopped. |
| Discourage sharing of personal items | Encourage your child not to share eating or drinking utensils, towels, or personal items with others. |
| Wash your hands often | Hand hygiene is the best way to prevent the spread of infection. Encourage your child to cleanse their hands with soap and warm water or an alcohol-based hand rub if soap and water are not available. |
| Launder shared items often | Sheets, towels, and clothing should be laundered once a week, if possible. |

