

Student Health Services University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown

Prevention of the spread of MRSA in the college setting

Studies have shown that MRSA is capable of prolonged survival on everyday surfaces.

What everyone should know about MRSA

What is MRSA?

- Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) is a bacterium that causes infections in different parts of the body. It is tougher to treat than most strains of *Staphylococcus aureus* – or Staph – because it's immune to some commonly used antibiotics.

What is *Staphylococcus aureus* or Staph?

- Staph is a type of bacteria. It may cause skin infections that look like pimples or boils. Skin infections caused by Staph may be red, swollen, painful, or have pus or other drainage.

Who gets MRSA? *Anyone!...including otherwise healthy individuals.*

- The following increases one's chance of contracting MRSA:
 - Skin-to-skin contact with someone who has MRSA
 - Contact with items and surfaces that have MRSA on them
 - Openings in their skin such as cuts or scrapes
 - Crowded living conditions (such as dormitories)
 - Athletes participating in contact sports
 - Poor hygiene

How is MRSA spread?

- MRSA is almost always spread by direct physical contact with the bacteria. This may include contact with an infected person or by touching objects contaminated with bacteria, such as towels, sheets, wound dressings, hands, clothes or sports equipment. MRSA can survive for long periods (as much as 2 weeks) on everyday surfaces if the surface is not disinfected.

How do I know if I have MRSA?

- MRSA skin infections often look like a spider bite in the early stage. If you have a red, swollen, painful skin lesion that has pus or other drainage, you should be seen by a healthcare professional.

Should a person with a MRSA skin infection be allowed to attend school?

- Yes, as long as the wound can be covered with a clean, dry dressing.

How serious is MRSA?

- Most isolated MRSA skin infections are minor and may be easily treated.
- MRSA also may cause more serious infections, such as infections of the bloodstream, surgical sites, or pneumonia.
- It is important to contact your doctor if your infection does not get better.

How are MRSA infections treated?

- The best treatment is drainage of any abscess or wound. Warm compresses may be ordered to facilitate the drainage of the wound.
- An antibiotic may be prescribed: many physicians do NOT treat simple, isolated MRSA infections with antibiotics as it facilitates newer strains of MRSA that will be harder to treat in the future. If an antibiotic is prescribed, be sure to take all of the antibiotics even if the wound has healed.

How do I keep MRSA from spreading?

- Wash your hands often or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Keep your cuts and scrapes clean and cover them with bandages.
- Do not touch other people's cuts or bandages.
- Athletes should not participate in play if they have open, draining wounds that cannot be covered and drainage contained.
- Athletes should shower after practice or games and wash uniforms after all events.
- Do not share personal items like towels or razors.

Prevention for the Spread of MRSA in the college environment

- Keep your hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Use the 15 second rule while washing hands, this is just enough time to sing the alphabet or birthday song.
- Avoid sharing personal and skin care items such as clothing and balms or moisturizers.
- Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healed.
- Avoid contact with other people's wounds or bandages, and wash hands immediately after changing a bandage.
- Seek medical attention immediately if a wound does not heal properly or appears to be infected.
- Students and professors should be encouraged to report known or suspected MRSA infections to the University nurse.
- It is recommended that computer keyboards be disinfected daily for 5 seconds with chlorine or phenol based wipes such as liquid Lysol.

Prevention for the SPREAD of MRSA in Athletic Environments:

- Showering with soap after every practice or tournament. In team locations where soap is often shared, switch to a liquid soap.
- Avoid sharing personal items such as towels, washcloths, razors, clothing or uniforms.
- Never wipe your face with a towel used on athletic equipment.
- Avoid sharing balms, lubricants and moisturizers.
- Wash uniforms, clothes, towels and sheets that become soiled with water and laundry detergent. Drying clothes in a hot dryer, rather than air-drying, also helps kill bacteria in clothes.
- Non-washable gear (e.g. head protectors), should be wiped down with a phenol or chlorine based wipe such as liquid Lysol after each use.
- Athletic equipment such as wrestling or gymnastics mats should be wiped down regularly with an antibacterial solution such as diluted Liquid Lysol.
- Do not share whirlpools with other team members.
- Whirlpools in athletic rooms must be emptied and disinfected between uses.
- Do not shave body skin for wound care or cosmetic reasons.