



## PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

## MRSA Skin Infections

### The Disease

Staphylococcal, or "staph" bacteria are often found on the skin or in the noses of healthy people and do not usually cause illness. MRSA stands for methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*. These are staph bacteria that have become resistant to certain antibiotics, making them more difficult to treat.

Anyone can get MRSA skin infections. They are more common among hospital patients, people in long term care facilities like nursing homes and prisons. Antibiotic-resistant infections are becoming more common in the community. The infections occur among children and care givers in day care centers, athletes and people who inject "street" drugs.

### Symptoms

MRSA skin infections are generally minor, such as pimples, boils and other skin conditions. They are often mistaken for spider bites. Left untreated, these infections can get worse. These infections could spread to the bloodstream or lungs, causing serious illness and possibly death. If you suspect a MRSA skin infection, you should seek medical attention.

### Diagnosis

Your healthcare provider may take a small sample of the infected area. This sample is sent to a laboratory and tested to see which antibiotics will be effective for treating the infection.

### Treatment

Even though MRSA skin infections are resistant to certain antibiotics, early diagnosis and treatment can stop the infection from getting worse. Treatment of MRSA skin infections should include drainage of the wound (by your healthcare provider) when it is appropriate to do so. If antibiotics are needed, your healthcare provider will decide which antibiotic is best for your infection. Unless your doctor tells you otherwise, **TAKE ALL THE ANTIBIOTICS**, even if the infection is getting better. Follow all of your healthcare provider's instructions. In severe cases, surgery may be needed to cure the infection.

### Reducing the Risk

If you think you may have a staph skin infection, see your healthcare provider right away. They will tell you how you can best protect yourself and others from this infection.

## **Reducing the Risk (continued)**

Take the following steps to prevent the spread of antibiotic-resistant staph skin infections to others:

- Cover skin infections with clean bandages. Pus and drainage from the infection can easily spread to others. Wear clothing that covers the infected area.
- Wash your hands! Wash hands with soap and water frequently throughout the day, especially after touching the wound or changing bandages. Soap does **not** need to be "antibacterial" soap.
- Do not share personal care items such as towels, razors or bar soap with others.
- Clean your bathroom and personal care items frequently.
- Wash towels, bedding and clothing in hot water and bleach. Dry these items in a hot air dryer to help kill the bacteria.
- Tell your healthcare providers if you have a history of MRSA skin infection.

## **For More Information Contact**

- Your healthcare provider
- Your local health department
- The New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services website at [www.nj.gov/health](http://www.nj.gov/health)
- The New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services, Communicable Disease Service at 609-588-7500
- The CDC website at [http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/hip/Aresist/ca\\_mrsa\\_public.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/hip/Aresist/ca_mrsa_public.htm)

7/2005