**Frequently Asked Questions about MRSA**

**What is MRSA?**

**MRSA** stands for “**m**ethicillin-**r**esistant ***S****taphylococcus* ***a****ureus*.”

MRSA is a type of *Staphylococcus aureus* (“staph”) bacteria, which is resistant to some kinds of antibiotics. It is resistant to a family of antibiotics related to penicillin.

**What is *Staphylococcus aureus*?**

*Staphylococcus aureus*, often referred to as “staph,” are bacteria commonly found on the skin or in the nose of healthy people. About 20-40% of the U.S. population carries staph bacteria on their bodies. These bacteria do not always cause illness or infection.

**Is MRSA different from other staph?**

MRSA is a type of staph. It too can be carried on the skin or in the nose of healthy people without making them sick. Only about 1% of people are colonized with MRSA. MRSA can cause skin infections that look just like infections caused by other staph and is also spread the same way.

**How are staph bacteria spread?**

Staph bacteria, 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 may also be spread by sharing personal items such as razors. Skin infections can start when bacteria get into a break in the skin such as a cut or scrape.

**Do staph bacteria always make people sick?**

No. There are many different strains of staph and not all of them are harmful. Staph bacteria can be found on the skin and in the nose of many healthy people. These people are often considered to be “colonized” because they carry the bacteria but do not have skin infections or any other symptoms of illness.

**What kinds of infections do some people get from staph, including MRSA?**

Staph bacteria are one of the most common causes of skin infections such as pimples, boils, rashes. These infections often contain pus, may feel itchy or warm, and may be swollen or red. On occasion, staph can cause more serious infections such as surgical wound infections, bloodstream infections, and pneumonia.

**What are the symptoms of an infection caused by MRSA?**

The symptoms of a MRSA infection are largely the same symptoms of an infection due to non-drug resistant staph bacteria. Pimples, rashes, pus-filled boils (especially when warm, painful, red or swollen), can indicate that you have a skin infection possibly due to staph bacteria. If staph infections do not get proper treatment, they can sometimes lead to more serious outcomes such as severe skin infection, bloodstream infections, and pneumonia. Those symptoms could include high fever, swelling, heat and pain around a wound, headache, fatigue, and others.

**Does MRSA cause more serious infections than other staph?**

No, MRSA does not usually cause more serious problems than other staph. However, because MRSA can’t be identified without special lab tests, it is not always identified and treated with proper antibiotics. That could make the infection last longer or eventually lead to more serious outcomes.

**What should I do if I think I have a staph/MRSA infection?**

Keep the area clean and dry. See your physician, especially if the infection is large, painful, warm to the touch, or does not heal by itself.

**How will my physician test to see if I have a staph/MRSA infection?**

Your physician will usually take a sample of the drainage (pus) on a swab (like a Q-tip) from the infected area. The sample will be sent to a laboratory to see if the infection is caused by staph. If the infection is caused by staph the lab will also test to see if your infection is resistant to any antibiotics. If your infection is in an area other than your skin, blood and other body fluids can also be tested for staph bacteria.

**How are MRSA infections treated?**

MRSA infections are treated by good wound and skin care: keep the area clean and dry, wash your hands after caring for the area, carefully dispose of any bandages, and allow your body to heal. Additionally, treatment of MRSA often requires the use of antibiotics. If you are prescribed antibiotics, it is important to take all that you are given unless your physician tells you to stop. If the infection has not improved within a few days after seeing your physician, contact your physician again.

**How can I prevent a staph/MRSA infection?**

Regular hand washing is the best way to prevent getting and spreading staph/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 staph from one person to another.
* Keep your skin healthy, and avoid getting dry, cracked skin, especially during the winter. Healthy skin helps to keep staph/MRSA on the surface of your skin from causing an infection underneath your skin.
* See a physician if you have any questions or an infection that does not improve.