

# **Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus Aureus* (MRSA)**

## **What is a staph infection? What is MRSA?**

"Staph," or *staphylococcus*, is a type of bacteria that naturally exist in the environment, including on people's skin. If the bacteria enter under the skin through a cut or scrape, the staph bacteria may cause skin infections that look like pimples or boils. Infections caused by staph may be red, swollen, painful, or have pus or other drainage. Most staph infections are minor and can be treated without antibiotics. Some staph infections resist treatment to a class of antibiotics and are known as Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* or MRSA. This makes these infections harder to treat because it is resistant to the antibiotic most commonly used. There are however, a couple of other antibiotics to which the bacteria are susceptible and can be used to treat the infection.

## **Who is at risk for MRSA infection?**

People who are generally healthy are not at high risk for MRSA infections. If they get a staph infection, they can usually fight it off. Staph infections, including MRSA infections, occur most frequently among people in hospitals and health-care facilities who have weakened immune systems. MRSA infections are becoming more common in the community, but are still rare.

## **Are school children at greater risk for MRSA infection?**

The average child is not at increased risk. However, a child who participates in team and contact sports might be. Staph infects a person through skin-to-skin contact; the bacteria must get under the skin through openings such as cuts or abrasions. The risk increases if children share personal items, such as towels or razors. Staph-contaminated items and surfaces, crowded conditions, and poor personal hygiene increase the risk of infection, and may be found in school settings. However, it is important to note that staph infections can be prevented by simple measures such as washing hands thoroughly before cooking or eating and after using the restroom, and cleaning and covering all cuts and scrapes until they are healed.

## **Is a MRSA infection treatable?**

MRSA infections are treated effectively using other antibiotics and draining the infected site of pus. More serious infections, such as pneumonia, bloodstream infections, or bone infections, are very rare in healthy people who get MRSA infections.

## **How can I protect myself from MRSA and staph infections?**

It is important to practice good hygiene. You can protect yourself from infections by:

- Keeping your hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Keeping cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healed.
- Avoiding contact with other people's wounds or bandages.
- Avoiding sharing personal items such as towels or razors.