



Information Provided By:  
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## FAQ: Methicillin-Resistant Staph Aureus (MRSA)

### What is *Staphylococcus aureus* (staph)?

- *Staphylococcus aureus*, often referred to simply as "staph," are bacteria commonly carried on the skin or in the nose of healthy people.
- Approximately 25% to 30% of the population is colonized (when bacteria are present, but not causing an infection) in the nose with staph bacteria.
- Staph bacteria are one of the most common causes of skin infections in the United States and can also cause serious infections (such as surgical wound infections, bloodstream infections, and pneumonia).

### What is MRSA (methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*)?

- Some staph bacteria are resistant to antibiotics.
- MRSA is a type of staph that is resistant to antibiotics called beta-lactams, which include methicillin and other antibiotics such as penicillin and amoxicillin.

### Who gets staph or MRSA infections?

- Staph infections, including MRSA, can occur among persons in hospitals and healthcare facilities who have weakened immune systems.
- MRSA infections that are acquired by persons outside of hospitals and healthcare facilities who **have not** been recently (within the past year) hospitalized or had a medical procedure (such as dialysis, surgery, catheters) are known as community-associated MRSA (CA-MRSA).
- Staph or MRSA infections in the community are usually manifested as skin infections, such as pimples and boils, and occur in otherwise healthy people.
- Factors that have been associated with the spread of MRSA skin infections include: close skin-to-skin contact, openings in the skin such as cuts or abrasions, contaminated items and surfaces, crowded living conditions, and poor hygiene.

### What does a staph or MRSA infection look like?

- Staph bacteria, including MRSA, can cause skin infections that may look like a pimple or boil and can be red, swollen, painful, or have pus or other drainage. More serious infections may cause pneumonia, bloodstream infections, or surgical wound infections.

### How can I prevent staph or MRSA skin infections?

Prevention steps:

1. Keep your hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
2. Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healed.
3. Avoid contact with other people's wounds or bandages.
4. Avoid sharing personal items such as towels or razors.
5. Use a barrier (e.g., clothing or a towel) between your skin and shared equipment.
6. Wipe surfaces of equipment with a disinfectant before and after use.
7. Persons with skin infections should avoid participating in contact sports, other skin-to-skin contact, or swimming until infection is healed.



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### How did I get MRSA?

- MRSA is transmitted most frequently by direct skin-to-skin contact.

### What should I do if I think I have a staph or MRSA infection?

- Cover your wound or sore and frequently wash your hands with soap and water.
- See your healthcare provider.

### Are staph and MRSA infections treatable?

- Yes. Most staph and MRSA infections are treatable with antibiotics.
- A health care provider may treat some infections by draining the abscess or boil and some may not require antibiotics.
- If you see a health care provider and are given an antibiotic:
  5. Take all of the doses, even if the infection is getting better,
  6. Do not share antibiotics with other people or save unfinished antibiotics to use at another time.
  7. If the infection is not getting better after 3 days, contact your healthcare provider again.
  8. If other people you know or live with get a serious skin infection tell them to go to their healthcare provider.

### Is it possible that my staph or MRSA skin infection will come back after it is cured?

- Yes. It is possible to have a staph or MRSA skin infection come back (recur) after it is cured. To prevent this from happening, follow your healthcare provider's directions while you have the infection, and follow the [prevention steps](#) after the infection is gone.

### If I have a MRSA skin infection, how can prevent others from getting infected?

- **Cover your wound.** Keep wounds that are draining or have pus covered with clean, dry bandages. Follow your healthcare provider's instructions on proper care of the wound. Pus from infected wounds can contain staph and MRSA, so keeping the infection covered will help prevent the spread to others. Bandages or tape can be discarded with the regular trash.
- **Discard used bandages immediately.** Throw away used bandages in a closed container, which can be your regular trash.
- **Clean your hands.** You, your family, and others in close contact should wash their hands frequently with soap and warm water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, especially after changing the bandage or touching the infected wound.
- **Do not share personal items.** Avoid sharing personal items such as towels, washcloths, razors, clothing, or uniforms that may have had contact with the infected wound or bandage. Wash sheets, towels, and clothes that become soiled with water and laundry detergent. Drying clothes in a hot dryer, rather than air-drying, also helps kill bacteria in clothes.
- **Talk to your doctor.** Tell any healthcare providers who treat you that you have or had a staph or MRSA skin infection.