



MRSA Protecting Your Family

What is MRSA?

“Staph” bacteria (staphylococcus aureus) is a common cause of skin infections. Antibiotics typically kill the bacteria. MRSA or Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus, is the same infection, only it is resistant to some of the commonly prescribed antibiotics. In other words, some antibiotics will not work to kill the bacteria.



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How do you get a skin infection?

Everyone's skin has some level of bacteria on it. Usually it is no cause for alarm. But, when "staph" bacteria gets into your body through a break in the skin, they can cause a "staph" infection.

How does it spread?

"Staph" infections are contagious and spread to other people via skin-to-skin contact. Sharing things like bedding, towels, soap, clothes and sports equipment can also result in the spread of the bacteria.

Why are "staph" infections getting harder to treat?

Penicillin and some other antibiotics previously would kill "staph" germs. MRSA is a super bacteria that has become resistant to these traditional treatments. That's why you need to be careful to take antibiotics only when prescribed by your health care provider. Taking them when they are not needed has created stronger germs.

It also used to be that MRSA infections occurred most often in nursing homes and in hospitals, where people were recovering from surgery.

Today, more and more cases are showing up in people of all ages in the community. These "community-acquired" cases of MRSA can be treated effectively with other kinds of antibiotics.

What does a "staph" infection look like?

Some common skin infections caused by "staph" are:

- **Boils** – tender, red lumps that swell and get white heads like very big pimples. Boils form on oily or moist skin, such as the neck, armpits, groin and buttock. They may break open and ooze pus or blood.
- **Impetigo** – blisters with fluid in them, which pop and get a yellow crust. Children often get it on the face. It can be spread by scratching.
- **Infected hair roots (follicles)** – small bumps under the skin at the base of the hair. They may itch.

What should I do if I have these symptoms?

Skin infections, as described, should be brought to the attention of your health care provider.

How do I protect myself and my family?

The easiest way to protect yourself and your family from skin infections is simply to wash hands frequently. Washing your hands often with soap and water also helps in preventing flu and colds.

Here are some additional tips on how to keep safe:

- Wash cuts, scrapes and sores with soap and water and then keep them clean and dry. Cover them with bandages until they are healed.
- Avoid contact with other people's cuts or sores and any materials that may have come into contact with them.
- Avoid sharing personal items such as soap, towels and razors.
- Clean and wash clothing and sports equipment after each and every use.

When should I call the doctor?

You should call a doctor if you have signs of a skin infection, such as pain, redness, swelling, heat or the oozing of pus or blood. You should also call the doctor if new symptoms develop during or after you get treated.

What happens if MRSA goes untreated?

In its most extreme cases, MRSA can develop into more serious, even life-threatening problems such as infections of the heart, blood and bones.



If you are looking for a physician, call the Rockford Health System Physician Referral Service at **(815) 971-DRDR**.