



Hawaii State Department of Health

Disease Investigation Branch

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Methicillin Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* MRSA

What is *Staphylococcus aureus* and MRSA?

Staphylococcus aureus, often called “staph” are bacteria commonly found on the skin or in the nose of healthy people. If the bacteria enter the skin through a cut or scrape, the wound can become infected. Staph bacteria are one of the most common causes of skin infections in the US. Most staph skin infections are minor and can be treated without medicines. However, staph bacteria can also cause more serious infections when they invade deeper tissues, the bloodstream or the lungs, causing pneumonia.

Some staph bacteria do not respond to medicines. MRSA is a type of staph that is resistant to medicines such as penicillin and amoxicillin.

What are the symptoms of a staph or MRSA infection?

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 are staph infections spread?

Staph is spread through skin to skin contact and from direct contact with contaminated surfaces. Athletes, especially wrestlers and football players, are at high risk of skin infections from staph. Staph lives in salt water, and swimming or surfing with broken skin can cause infection.

Many people are also infected with the bacteria from their own skin or noses.

How are staph and MRSA infections treated?

Most staph infections are treatable with medications prescribed by a doctor. MRSA infections can be treated by draining the wound. If the infection is not getting better with treatment, contact your doctor again, as the bacteria could be resistant to the medicine.

How can I prevent staph or MRSA infections?

Most skin infections can be prevented with good hygiene.

Wash your hands thoroughly and often with soap and water, or use a hand sanitizer, especially after changing bandages or touching a wound.

Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healed.

Avoid contact with other people’s wounds.

Don’t share personal items such as towels, washcloths, razors or clothing that may have had contact with an infected wound.

Wash sheets, towels and clothing that have become soiled with water and laundry detergent. Drying clothing in a hot dryer, rather than air-drying, will help kill bacteria in clothing.

If you are an athlete, or someone who has frequent skin to skin contact with others, be extra careful with your personal hygiene. To learn more, visit: [Prevention Information and Advice for Athletes](#)

For more information, see the [CDC’s website](#).