



Hawaii State Department of Health

Disease Investigation Branch

Oahu 586-4586, Maui 984-8213, Hilo 933-0912,

Kona 322-4877, Kauai 241-3563

Methicillin Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA)

What is MRSA?

Staphylococcus aureus (often called “Staph”) are bacteria commonly found on the skin or in the nose and respiratory tract of healthy people, and do not cause any problems most of the time. However, sometimes Staph can cause serious infections such as skin or wound infections, pneumonia, or blood infections. In these cases, people are given antibiotics to kill the Staph bacteria. MRSA is a specific type of Staph that does not respond to some of the antibiotics most often used to treat Staph infections.

How do you get it?

Anyone can get MRSA on their body from contact with other people or things that already carry the bacterium. Those at highest risk include athletes, daycare and school students, military personnel in barracks, and those who recently received inpatient medical care. In the community, MRSA can be spread by sharing towels, sheets, razors, and other personal items. In the healthcare setting, MRSA is usually spread via the hands of healthcare personnel. Additionally, people can become infected with the bacteria from their own skin or noses.

What are the symptoms of MRSA?

Staph bacteria, including MRSA, can cause skin infections that may look like a pimple, boil, or spider bite and can be red, swollen, painful, or have pus or other drainage. More serious infections may include pneumonia (lung infection), meningitis (infection of the lining around the brain and spinal cord), bloodstream infections, or surgical wound infections.

When do symptoms start?

Some people can be colonized with MRSA and never get an infection. For those who do get an infection, symptom onset varies from days to years after exposure.

What is the treatment for MRSA?

Most Staph infections are treated by draining pus from the wound. Antibiotics may be needed and prescribed by a doctor. MRSA infections are treated the same way; although the usual antibiotics will not work, there are usually other antibiotic options.

How can you avoid getting it?

In the community:

- Maintain good hand and body hygiene. Wash hands often, and clean your body regularly, especially after exercise.
- Keep cuts, scrapes, and wounds clean and covered until healed.
- Avoid sharing personal items such as towels and razors.

In the healthcare setting:

- Make sure all healthcare providers clean their hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer before and after touching you. If you do not see your providers clean their hands, ask them to do so.

Going home:

- If you have wounds or an intravascular device (such as a catheter or dialysis port which sits in a blood vessel) make sure you know how to take care of them.
- Ask if your temporary medical device (e.g., catheter) can be removed.
- If you see the access area start to look infected (red, swollen, warm, draining), call your doctor right away, especially if you have a fever.

For more information, see the CDC’s website at <https://www.cdc.gov/mrsa/>