

ERIC FRYKMAN, MD, MPH
PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICER
SUSAN D. HARRINGTON, M.S., R.D.
DIRECTOR, DEPT. OF PUBLIC HEALTH

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS: STAPH / MRSA SKIN INFECTIONS

Drug sensitive Staph bacteria are commonly found on the skin of healthy persons. Recently, people in Riverside County are getting skin infections caused by

Staphylococcus aureus ("Staph") bacteria that are resistant to many antibiotics (drugs that kill bacteria), also called **methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus – "MRSA"**. The Riverside County Department of Public Health is working with the public, doctors, and nurses to understand why this is happening and how to prevent these Staph/MRSA skin infections from spreading.



What is a Staph/MRSA skin infection?

It can be a pimple, rash, boil, or an open wound.

Staph/MRSA is often **misdiagnosed as spider bites**. Symptoms of a Staph/MRSA infection include redness, warmth, swelling, pus, tenderness of the skin, pimples, boils or blisters. Staph/MRSA infected skin lesions may progress quickly from a skin or surface irritation to an abscess or serious skin infections. If left untreated, Staph/MRSA can infect blood and bones.



How do Staph/MRSA skin infections spread?

Staph/MRSA lives on skin and survives on objects for 24 hours or more.

Drainage from skin lesions can spread Staph/MRSA bacteria to other parts of a person's body or to other persons. The cleanest person can get a Staph/MRSA infection. Staph/MRSA skin infections can be found in places where there are crowds of people (schools, jails, etc.). Staph/MRSA can rub off the skin of an infected person and onto the skin of another person during skin-to-skin contact. Staph/MRSA can also come off the infected skin of a person and onto a shared object or surface, getting onto the skin of the next person who uses it. Examples of commonly shared objects include towels, soap, benches in hot tubs, and athletic equipment – in other words, anything that could have touched the skin of a Staph/MRSA infected person can carry the bacteria to the skin of another person.



How can I prevent myself or my family members from getting infected?

Wash your hands with soap and warm water.

Keep cuts and scrapes clean with soap and water. Avoid skin contact and sharing personal items with anyone you suspect that could have a Staph/MRSA skin infection. Clean objects that you share with other persons, such as athletic equipment, before you use it. Always wash clothes and towels that might be carrying Staph/MRSA.



What should I do if I think I have a skin infection?

Consult your doctor or healthcare provider.

Early treatment can help prevent the infection from getting worse. If you have a bad abscess, your healthcare provider should drain the pus. If you are prescribed antibiotics, be sure to take all of your pills. Follow directions from your healthcare provider closely, even when you start to feel better.

If my doctor / healthcare provider has told me that I have a Staph/MRSA skin infection, what can I do to keep others from getting infected?

Clean your bandages, your hands, and your home.

Keep the infected area covered with clean, dry bandages. Pus from infected wounds can infect others. **Wash your hands frequently** with soap and warm water, especially after changing your bandages or touching infected skin.



Regularly clean your bathroom, kitchen, and all other rooms, as well as your personal items. Wash clothes and other items that become soiled in hot water.

Use bleach whenever possible. Drying clothes in a hot dryer, rather than air-drying, also helps kill Staph/MRSA on clothes.

Tell all healthcare providers who treat you that you have a Staph/MRSA skin infection.

