

**Communicable Disease Epidemiology
and Immunization Section**

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To King County Businesses and Workplaces,

In response to growing public awareness of methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA), Public Health is providing information and resources for non-healthcare work places that should be useful in responding to questions and concerns from employees and clients.

Staphylococcus aureus, often referred to simply as "staph," is a type of bacteria commonly carried on the skin or in the nose of healthy people. Staph bacteria are one of the most common causes of skin infections. MRSA refers to types of staph that are resistant to an antibiotic called methicillin. This means that infections with the bacteria do not respond to some of the antibiotics that are commonly used against staph infections. While 25% to 30% of the population is colonized with staph (meaning that bacteria are present, but not causing an infection or symptoms), approximately 1% is colonized with MRSA. In some areas of the country, MRSA is the most common cause of skin and soft tissue infections seen in emergency departments. MRSA is transmitted most frequently by direct skin-to-skin contact or contact with shared items or surfaces that have come into contact with someone else's infection.

Though MRSA is an important health problem facing our community, the news media's recent focus on the most dramatic cases of MRSA does not accurately reflect the spectrum of illness from the bacteria. Most cases of MRSA are treatable skin infections that heal with proper wound care, sometimes without requiring antibiotics. Although MRSA can cause severe infections among previously healthy people in the community, this is relatively rare. It is also uncommon for severe infections to spread to others if appropriate precautions are taken. Even in severe cases, most patients respond to antibiotics.

Our recommendations to prevent transmission of MRSA are:

- Persons with skin or soft tissue infections should see their health care providers promptly for evaluation and treatment.
- Open or draining wounds should be covered at all times – contact with drainage from an infected wound greatly increases the chance of transmission.
- Persons who have an open infected wound that cannot be kept securely covered should not have physical contact with others until the wound is healed.
- Promote frequent hand washing and good personal hygiene.
- Regularly clean and disinfect equipment that has frequent skin contact and do not allow sharing of towels and other personal equipment. Particular attention should be paid to surfaces that are likely to come into contact with uncovered or poorly covered infections.
- Use detergent-based cleaners or Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered disinfectants that are effective at removing MRSA from the environment.

Please review information on MRSA in the workplace available at: www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/mrsa, and our Public Health Fact Sheet on MRSA at: www.metrokc.gov/health/prevcont/mrsa.htm

Sincerely,



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