



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,” is the name of 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. *S. aureus* is one of the most common causes of skin infections in the United States. Most staph skin infections are minor and can be treated without medicines. However, staph bacteria can also cause more serious infections.

Some staph bacteria do not respond to medicines used to fight bacteria. MRSA, or methicillin resistant *S. aureus*, is a type of staph that is resistant to penicillin type medicines.

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 include pneumonia (lung infection), meningitis (infection of the lining of the brain and spinal cord), bloodstream infections, or surgical wound infections.

How are staph infections spread?

Staph is spread through skin to skin contact and from direct contact with surfaces that have been in contact with an infected wound. Athletes, especially wrestlers and football players, are at high risk of skin infections from staph. 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 treated by draining pus from the wound. Medicines may be needed and prescribed by a doctor. MRSA infections are treated the same way, except that the usual medicines will

not work. If the infection is not getting better with treatment, contact your doctor again, as the bacteria could be resistant to the medicine, and a different one will need to be prescribed.

How can I prevent staph or MRSA infections?

Most skin infections can be prevented with good hygiene.

Wash your hands well 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 recreational water exposure (especially sea water) until wounds are healed, as constant moisture can delay healing and increase the risk of infection.

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.

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

If you are an athlete, or someone who has frequent skin to skin contact with others, be extra careful with your personal hygiene. Be sure to shower well after games and practices and disinfect surfaces such as mats daily.

For more information, see the CDC’s website at http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_mrsa_ca_public.html#1