Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA)

[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC—safer, healthier people.

[Host] "MRSA" has been featured in the news and on television programs a great deal recently. MRSA stands for methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus.* This type of bacteria causes "staph" infections that are resistant to treatment with some antibiotics. For some expert advice about MRSA, we'll be talking today with Jeff Hageman, an epidemiologist with CDC's Division of Healthcare Quality Promotion.

Mr. Hageman, the topic of MRSA has been in the news quite a bit recently, especially related to schools. What exactly is MRSA?

[Mr. Hageman] Let me start by saying that CDC understands that parents and school officials are concerned and want to do everything they can to protect students and prevent the spread of MRSA skin infections. MRSA is a type of antibiotic-resistant bacteria called *Staphylococcus aureus* or simply "staph." It's resistant to commonly prescribed antibiotics. Now, while staph infections have been around for a long time, until recently, most people who got MRSA infections were in the hospital or other healthcare settings. But over the past several years, MRSA has emerged in the community as one of the most common causes of skin infections. These infections may appear as small pustules or boils, which are often red, swollen, painful, or have pus associated with them. They commonly occur at sites of visible skin trauma, such as cuts or abrasions, or can occur at sites commonly covered by hair on the body, like the back of the neck, groin, buttock, armpit, or the bearded area of men. It's also important to mention that although rarely occurring in healthy people, more serious infections can occur, such as pneumonia, bloodstream infections, and bone infections. However, most of the life-threatening MRSA infections are associated with healthcare.

[Host] We sometimes hear MRSA referred to as a "superbug" in the media. Is that fair? Does that mean that MRSA has no cure?

[Mr. Hageman] Right. I think people commonly refer to MRSA as a "superbug," however, MRSA still has a number of antibiotics available for treatment. You know, it's important to emphasize that most of the infections we hear about happening in schools are MRSA skin infections and most of these infections may not need antibiotics at all. Usually, the first-line treatment for these skin infections is drainage. And of course, drainage of these skin infections should only be done by your healthcare provider.

[Host] How is MRSA transmitted?

[Mr. Hageman] MRSA is usually transmitted by direct skin-to-skin contact or contact with shared items or surfaces that have come into contact with someone else's infection, for example, a towel you might use for bathing or used bandages. Certain factors have been associated with making it easier for MRSA to be transmitted. These factors include crowding; frequent skin-to-skin contact; compromised skin, such as cuts

and abrasions; contaminated items or surfaces; and lack of cleanliness. Some settings where these factors are common include schools, dormitories, military barracks, households, correctional facilities, and daycare centers. Now while MRSA infections are commonly reported from these settings, it's important to emphasize that MRSA is a prevalent cause of skin infections in the general community and can occur essentially anywhere.

[HOST] So, for the people that are listening and wondering what they should do to protect themselves, what do you recommend?

[Mr. Hageman] There are a number of things that people can do to protect themselves—many simple measures. First, they can practice good hygiene—that's probably the most important. This includes keeping your hands clean by washing with soap and water regularly or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. It's also important, if you participate in activities where there is frequent skin-to-skin contact, like exercise or sports, you should shower immediately after participating in those activities. Also, people should cover their skin abrasions, those cuts and abrasions, to prevent them from getting infected. They should be covered by clean, dry bandages until healed. Everyone should avoid sharing personal items that come into direct contact with bare skin, such as the towels and razors. Barrier-like clothing or a towel should also be used between skin and shared equipment like weight-training benches. And finally, high-touch surfaces or surfaces that you frequently contact with your hands should be kept clean, and also other surfaces that might come into direct contact with people's skin should be cleaned routinely.

[Host] To summarize, MRSA infections are treatable and there are measures people can take to protect themselves. If people want more information about MRSA, where should they go?

[Mr. Hageman] They should go to the main CDC website, www.cdc.gov.

[Host] Thank you for taking the time to talk with us today, Mr. Hageman.

[Mr. Hageman] You're welcome. Thanks for having me.

[Announcer] To access the most accurate and relevant health information that affects you, your family, and your community, please visit www.cdc.gov.