

MRSA

Preventing Skin Infections

Special Health Information
for NJ's Inmates

What is MRSA?

Staph bacteria (*Staphylococcus aureus*) are one of the most common causes of skin infections in the United States. These skin infections are minor most of the time, and are usually cured by taking antibiotic drugs. But, *Staph* can also cause serious infections such as pneumonia (a lung infection) and bloodstream infections.

MRSA (methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*) is a type of *Staph* that has become resistant to some antibiotics. This means that some antibiotics can no longer kill the bacteria and makes MRSA harder to treat. If untreated, MRSA can cause serious health problems and could lead to death. About 5% of *Staph* skin infections are caused by MRSA.

Inside this issue:

Learn about MRSA.	1
See what MRSA looks like!	2
What puts you at risk?	2
Prevent the spread.	3
Handwashing tips.	3
What to do if you are infected.	4

Who is at risk for getting a MRSA infection?

Anyone can get a MRSA skin infection. Even healthy people with healthy skin can become infected. Some people are at high risk of getting MRSA skin infections such as:

- Hospital patients
- Prisoners
- People in nursing homes
- Children in schools and daycare
- Athletes
- Military recruits
- People with weak immune systems

Did you know?

MRSA infections are not spread through the air. You cannot get MRSA from someone who is coughing or sneezing.

How does MRSA spread?

MRSA spreads by direct physical contact. This means that a person must touch an infected person or touch an object that has the bacteria on it. MRSA spreads easily among people who spend time in close contact with each other, such as in prisons or jails and by playing contact sports. The following are some high risk activities for getting a MRSA infection:

- Sharing personal care items such as razors, bar soap, or towels
- Sharing clothes or uniforms that are not properly laundered
- Getting tattoos and body piercing using unsterile equipment
- Having sex, or being in close physical contact, with MRSA-infected people
- Sharing syringes (needles)
- Sharing athletic gear (pads or helmets) that is not cleaned regularly

Although MRSA infections can be mistaken for spider bites, spiders do not spread MRSA.



What are the signs of a MRSA infection?

MRSA skin infections can look like an insect bite, an infected pimple, a boil, or a rash. They are usually red, sore and may have pus or fluid dripping from the site of infection. People with MRSA skin infections may or may not have a fever. MRSA can cause many different looking infections. Some of the most common ways that MRSA appears can be seen in the pictures below.



How can inmates protect themselves?

Keeping our body and our belongings clean are very important to prevent and control the spread of MRSA.

- Wash hands frequently throughout the day
- Shower after playing contact sports or using gym equipment
- Wipe down gym equipment before and after use
- Keep skin covered with clothing as much as possible
- Wash clothes in hot water and dry in a hot air dryer
- Cover ANY skin wound, cut, scrape, or sore
- Clean your personal living space

When cleaning, **always** use cleaning products according to the instructions. Any EPA-registered product is fine to use for cleaning.

Think you know how to wash your hands?

A little splash of water is NOT enough to clean your hands. Good handwashing requires soap, water, and friction (rubbing).

Follow these easy steps to be sure your hands are getting clean each time you wash:

- Use warm water and soap. Do not share bar soap. Do not leave your bar of soap in the bathroom. Keep it with your personal belongings.
- Rub hands for 20 seconds
- Wash palms, backs, under nails, between fingers, and wrists
- Rinse off all soap
- Dry hands with a paper towel
- Use the paper towel to turn off the water tap
- Use the paper towel to open the bathroom door
- Throw away the paper towel immediately after leaving the bathroom



Wash Your Hands Frequently!!!

What should inmates do if they think they have MRSA?

There is no routine screening test to find out who may become infected with MRSA. The only way to know for sure if you have a MRSA skin infection is to have the sore tested by a health care provider. All skin infections should be checked out by medical services.

If you think you have a MRSA skin infection:

- Keep the skin sore covered with a bandage or clothing at all times
- Do not share clothing, towels, or personal care items
- Seek medical care right away to prevent dangerous medical problems from developing.

REMEMBER...MRSA is able to be treated. A health care provider will determine the best antibiotics to use. Don't delay seeking treatment.

If you are diagnosed with a MRSA skin infection and see more than one health care provider, please let each health care provider know about your MRSA infection!

This information has been brought to you by the NJ Department of Health and Senior Services Communicable Disease Service.

