

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What is *Staphylococcus aureus*?

*Staphylococcus aureus* belongs to a group of bacteria known as “staph.” Staph bacteria are one of the most frequent causes of skin infections in the U.S. These skin infections are minor most of the time, but staph can also cause serious infections. These infections include wound infection, bloodstream infection and pneumonia.

### What are antibiotics?

Antibiotics are powerful medicines that are used to treat infections that are caused by bacteria. There are many different types of antibiotics. Each type of antibiotic is designed to kill specific bacteria. Antibiotics are not effective in treating illnesses like colds and flu, which are caused by viruses.

### What is MRSA?

MRSA are staph bacteria that have become resistant to certain antibiotics, making them more difficult to treat.

### Why is MRSA a serious public health threat?

Many lives have been saved with antibiotics. But after many years of use, and misuse, antibiotics are losing their power to fight certain infections. Some bacteria are becoming “resistant” to the medicines that are supposed to kill them. As more and more bacteria become resistant to antibiotics, people are being infected with bacteria that are difficult to treat. This is becoming a serious health threat around the world.

### Who gets MRSA skin infections?

Anyone can get a MRSA skin infection. Even healthy people with healthy skin can become infected.

### Are certain people at higher risk of getting MRSA skin infections?

Certain people are at higher risk of developing MRSA skin infections, including:

- Hospital patients
- Prisoners
- Nursing home residents and others in long-term care facilities
- Children attending day care
- Athletes
- Military recruits
- People with weakened immune systems

### How is MRSA spread?

Staph bacteria, including MRSA, are almost always spread by direct physical contact. Staph bacteria are not spread through the air. The bacteria can also spread when people come into contact with objects that have been contaminated with the bacteria. These objects include towels, clothing, bedding, gym or sports equipment and bandages.

### Can I get a staph or MRSA infection at my gym/health club?

Although MRSA is mainly spread from person to person by direct skin contact, it is possible to come in contact with the bacteria by using shared gym equipment. To protect yourself from infections in the gym:

- Cover cuts, scratches or scrapes with a clean bandage.
- Place a towel or piece of clothing between your skin and surfaces of shared equipment such as mats or weight benches.
- Wipe surfaces of equipment before and after use.

- Take a shower after your workout.
- Don't share personal items such as razors and towels.
- If you can't take a shower, wash your hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand cleaner.

### **Can MRSA skin infections be treated?**

Many staph skin infections, including those caused by MRSA, can be treated by draining the abscess or boil. Many of these infections do not need to be treated with antibiotics. Drainage of skin boils or abscesses should only be done by a healthcare provider.

Most staph infections, including those caused by MRSA, are treatable with antibiotics. Unless your doctor tells you otherwise, **TAKE ALL THE ANTIBIOTICS**, even if the infection is getting better. Don't share antibiotics with other people or save unfinished antibiotics for use at another time. If the infection is not better in a few days, contact your healthcare provider. If other people you know or live with get the same infection, tell them to go to their healthcare provider.

### **How can I prevent staph or MRSA infections?**

- Keep your hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healed.
- Avoid contact with other people's wounds or bandages.
- Don't share personal items such as towels or razors.

### **What should I do if I think I have a staph or MRSA infection? What can I do to prevent others from getting infected?**

See your healthcare provider as soon as possible. They will tell you how you can best protect yourself and others from this infection. Take the following steps to prevent the spread of antibiotic-resistant staph skin infections to others:

- Cover skin infections with clean bandages. Pus and drainage from the infection can easily spread to others. Wear clothing that covers the infected area.
- Wash hands with soap and water frequently throughout the day, especially after touching the wound or changing bandages. Soap does **not** need to be "antibacterial."
- Do not share personal care items such as towels, razors or bar soap with others.
- Clean your bathroom and personal care items frequently.
- Wash towels, bedding and clothing in hot water and bleach. Dry these items in a hot air dryer to help kill the bacteria.
- If you are diagnosed with a MRSA skin infection, tell any other healthcare providers you visit in the future that you have had MRSA.

### **Is it possible that my staph or MRSA skin infection will come back after it is treated?**

It is possible to have a staph or MRSA skin infection come back after it is treated. To prevent this from happening, follow your healthcare provider's directions while you have the infection and follow the prevention steps after the infection is gone.

### **Where can I get more information on MRSA?**

Your healthcare provider

Your local health department

NJ Department of Health <http://www.nj.gov/health>

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention <http://www.cdc.gov>