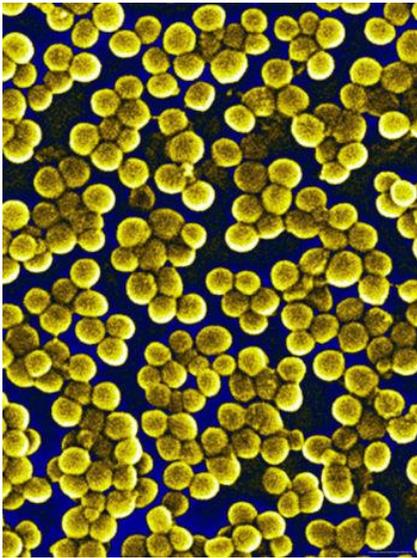




What you should know about MRSA

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MRSA is short for methicillin resistant staphylococcus aureus, a drug-resistant bacteria which can cause serious infections. Staphylococcus aureus, also known as “staph” is a very common bacteria which lives on the skin and in nasal passages of many people. Most of the time this bacteria is harmless, but if introduced into exposed wounds or into individuals with compromised immune systems infection can result. MRSA is a strain of staph aureus which has developed resistance to many available antibiotics, making treatment of infection with this bacteria quite difficult.

So where did MRSA come from? The truth is that bacteria have a great capacity to mutate and develop characteristics to ensure their survival. Drug resistant strains of bacteria have evolved because of the widespread use of antibiotics and by improper use of antibiotics. For example, only taking a few days of a prescribed antibiotic instead of finishing the entire course allows for remaining bacteria to develop resistance. MRSA has actually been around for years in hospitals but has recently become very common in the community as well.

Most community-acquired MRSA infections involve the skin and cause boils, abscesses or cellulitis. These can spread rapidly and require prompt medical attention. Many people feel that the infection started as a spider or insect bite. Abscesses and boils may require drainage and cellulitis necessitates proper antibiotics to eradicate the infection. To confirm the diagnosis of MRSA, cultures must be obtained. Some people are considered carriers of MRSA, which means that the MRSA is living on them all the time. This can not only result in repeated skin infections for the carrier, but also puts others at risk of MRSA infection. To determine if one is a carrier, nasal cultures are obtained to determine if MRSA is present.

Staphylococcus bacteria are spread from person to person through contact or by contaminated objects. Only rarely is the bacteria spread by an airborne route, such as a cold or flu. Therefore, practicing proper hygiene is the key to prevention. Keeping skin clean by frequent hand washing or using hand sanitizer and covering any wounds is important. It is also important not to share personal items such as razors or towels and to clean equipment and other surfaces often. Individuals with MRSA infections or carriers of MRSA should be treated with appropriate antibiotics to eradicate the bacteria.

Methicillin resistant staph aureus is out there, but awareness and proper hygiene can keep the bacteria from causing health problems. Keep in mind that staph is everywhere--it's on most of our bodies right now--but only in certain situations will infection result.