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What is methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) infection?

Staphylococcus aureus ("staph") is a common type of bacteria (germ) that is often found on the skin and in the nose of healthy people. It can also grow in wounds or other body sites, sometimes causing an infection. MRSA is a type of staph that is resistant to several antibiotics. The illnesses that MRSA causes are like those caused by other types of staph. The difference is in how they are treated.

Who gets MRSA infection?

Anyone can get MRSA, but some groups have a higher risk. These groups include athletes, daycare and school students, military personnel in barracks, people who receive inpatient medical care, people who have surgery or medical devices inserted in their body, and people who inject drugs.

How are MRSA and other types of staph bacteria spread?

Staph bacteria (including MRSA) are spread through contact with infected people, wounds, or things that have touched infected skin and are carrying the bacteria (e.g., towels, razors, athletic mats).

What are the symptoms of MRSA infection?

Symptoms of a MRSA or other staph infection depend on where the infection is located. Infections of the skin are the most common, and can cause redness, warmth, pus, and a wound that does not heal. Your doctor might refer to these infections as cellulitis, boils, furuncles, pustules, folliculitis, impetigo, or abscesses. A MRSA skin infection might be mistaken for a spider or insect bite.

More serious MRSA infections can also develop in the blood, bladder, lungs, or other sites and can cause fever and pain at the site of infection.

Many people carry staph bacteria on their skin or in their bodies without any symptoms. This is called being "colonized". A person might be colonized for a long time before getting sick or might never get sick.

How is MRSA infection diagnosed?

Consult your doctor if you think you have an infection. Usually, a sample is collected from the infection site (e.g., the skin, blood, urine, or sputum) and sent to the laboratory for testing. If staph is isolated, more laboratory tests are needed to determine which antibiotics will be effective for treating the infection. If the bacteria are resistant to certain antibiotics, a diagnosis of MRSA is made.

What is the treatment for MRSA and other staph infections?

Many staph skin infections, including those caused by MRSA, can be treated with appropriate wound care. It is important to keep wounds clean and cover them with a bandage. Additional treatment from a healthcare provider is needed if wounds are not healing properly or are draining. Finding infections early and getting proper care make it less likely that the infection will become severe. While MRSA can be resistant to several antibiotics, there are antibiotics available to treat MRSA infections. If antibiotics are prescribed, it is very important to finish taking all the pills and to call your doctor if the infection does not get better. More serious infections, like those in the blood or surgical wound infections, might require hospitalization or the use of intravenous (IV) antibiotics.

Except in special circumstances, treatment is not needed for people who carry MRSA but do not have any symptoms.

How can MRSA and other staph infections be prevented?

Maintain good hand and body hygiene. Clean hands often and clean your body regularly, especially after exercise.

- Be sure to clean your hands thoroughly after changing bandages or touching wounds. Put used bandages and tape in the trash.
- Keep cuts/wounds clean and covered until healed. Watch for signs of infection, such as redness, warmth, and swelling. If a sore or cut becomes red, oozes, causes pain, or isn't healing, see a doctor.
- Use barriers, like a towel or clothing, between your skin and shared surfaces.
- Avoid sharing personal items such as towels, washcloths, and razors.
- Take antibiotics exactly as prescribed by your healthcare provider.
    - This may include healthcare personnel wearing a gown and gloves when caring for you.
- If you are a patient or visitor in a healthcare facility, more strategies for preventing MRSA are available on the CDC website at cdc.gov/mrsa/hcp/infection-control/index.html.

How can I get more information about MRSA infection?

- If you have concerns about MRSA infection, contact your healthcare provider.
- Call your local health department. You can find your local health department at vdh.virginia.gov/health-department-locator/.
- Visit the VDH *Staphylococcus aureus* page at vdh.virginia.gov/haiar/staph-aureus/.
- Visit the CDC MRSA page at cdc.gov/mrsa/about/index.html.

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