

MRSA—What Is It, and What Should You Do About It?

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Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, otherwise known as MRSA, is a strain of staph bacteria, caused by *Staphylococcus aureus* bacteria, that has evolved and is now resistant to most antibiotics. MRSA is mostly limited to the skin but can also penetrate through the body, into the nose. MRSA begins as a small red bump, usually resembling either a pimple, bug bite, or a boil.

MRSA can be fatal; if and when the infection enters the body, further life-threatening infections can occur. In the past more serious illnesses have happened more frequently in older adults with weak immune systems, or with adults who reside in hospitals or nursing homes. In the last few years however, more serious infections have become more frequent in the community, usually only when personal belongings have been shared. Antibiotic resistance has been a known problem, but causes to this resistant have been humans themselves. Such causes are unnecessary antibiotic use, antibiotics in food and water, and germ mutation. Antibiotics that are ineffective against MRSA include methicillin, amoxicillin, and penicillin, as well as most other common anti-bacterial treatments.

There are currently two strains of MRSA--CA MRSA and HA MRSA. CA MRSA, otherwise known as community-associated MRSA, is a strain that has occurred among people in the community that would otherwise be healthy. HA MRSA, otherwise known as health care-associated MRSA, is a more widespread strain that occurs in hospitals and nursing homes. Risk factors for these two MRSA strains differ, as do treatment options.

Risk factors for CA MRSA include young age, participating in contact sports, sharing towels or other equipment, having a weakened immune system, living in crowded or unsanitary conditions, and association with health care workers. Risk factors for HA MRSA, on the other hand, include a current or recent hospitalization, living in a long term health care facility, invasive devices, and recent antibiotic use. What ever the risk, prevention is available, and whenever needed, medical advice can be sought. Of the two, while CA MRSA is susceptible to a specific series of more traditional antibiotics, while HA MRSA is vulnerable only to vancomycin – an extremely powerful antibiotic that can be lethal on its own (in less than 1% of cases).

As indicated in the beginning paragraph, signs of MRSA are the start of small red bumps. Always keep an eye on minor skin conditions, and when concerned, contact medical help immediately. Signs and symptoms of an infection include redness, pus, and a fever.

Prevention is not a hard thing to maintain. Washing hands is an all around must. Health care workers, and patients – or anyone else – should frequently wash their hands, especially when in contact with someone carrying MRSA. In the health care scene, washing hands, wearing gloves, and gowns worn by patients are also recommended. Other preventions can be made including: keep any wounds covered, keep any personal items to yourself, always shower after working out, sit out if you have an infection, always sanitize, use your antibiotics appropriately, and get tested if you believe may have MRSA. MRSA is out there, as well as many other diseases, but there are things you can do, so be safe, and have fun.