

Eastern Connecticut State University
Student Health Services
Division of Student Affairs



Methicillin-Resistant Staph Infections: What You Need To Know



Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) is a type of bacteria that can cause serious, hard to treat infections especially of the skin and much less commonly of the lungs (pneumonia) and blood. They are hard to treat because this germ is resistant to a number of different antibiotics. What's more, it can be spread from one person to another usually by direct skin-to skin contact and less so by inanimate objects. Still, despite scary terms like superbug, super infections and flesh-eating that have been much in the news lately, MRSA is treatable and responds to currently available medications.

Why do you need to know about MRSA? Because this bacteria, which in the past usually affected only very sick patients in hospitals, recently has started causing an increasing number of somewhat serious infections—mostly of the skin—in the general community including at schools and universities. Several cases of MRSA have been seen among UConn athletes. Here at Eastern, Student Health Services has seen three cases in the past 12 months, all among non-athletes and all of which have responded well to antibiotics.

Problems like MRSA have developed, in part, because antibiotics are being way overprescribed for things like routine colds, bronchitis and other illnesses for which they are not indicated and are of no benefit. As a result, germs like MRSA develop resistance to many different medications, making treatment more difficult. There are a couple of things you and all of us can do to help this situation. First, in the future, when you go to your health care provider for an illness and you are prescribed an antibiotic, ask if it is really necessary or can you get well without it? More often than not, you likely can. Second, if you are given an antibiotic, take all of it as prescribed even if your symptoms are gone before the prescription is used up and do not share these medicines with others. As for other things you can do, check out the lists below:

To prevent or at least reduce your risk of getting MRSA:

- Wash your hands frequently, as needed. Do so for at least 15 seconds with soap and warm-to-hot water. Alcohol-based products such as Purell are effective and convenient when soap and water are not available. (Hand washing is a good habit to have all the time to reduce the spread of colds, the flu and other infectious diseases as well as MRSA.)
- Avoid sharing bars of soap, razors (disposable or otherwise), towels, bedding, athletic equipment and other personal items.
- Avoid body shaving as it has been linked to an increased risk of staph skin infections, including MRSA.
- If you use fitness equipment in the weight or cardio rooms, thoroughly wipe it down with a cleaning agent or disinfectant after each use.
- Avoid using whirlpools or common tubs until any skin wounds, lesions, cuts, scrapes or abrasions you have are fully healed; likewise, refrain from sharing lotions and similar items if you have any skin wounds.

(Over)

- Be cautious if getting tattoos (one of the cases at Eastern may have been related to a new tattoo.)

If you suffer a cut, abrasion or any skin wound:

- Clean it thoroughly as soon as possible with warm-to-hot soapy water, dry it, apply antibacterial ointment such as Bacitracin, and then cover the wound with a bandaid or other protective dressing (both to prevent the wound from getting dirty and to prevent the wound from contaminating other individuals or objects.)
- Check the wound once each day (until it heals) for signs of infection, and then apply antibacterial ointment and a new bandaid or dressing. Discard all old dressings and any other contaminated wound care materials i.e. gloves, carefully and disinfect (Lysol, etc.) bathrooms or any other potentially contaminated areas as needed.
- If a skin wound looks like it is becoming infected (see section below), keep it covered and get medical attention.
- Follow the guidelines listed in the *Prevention* section above.

Seek medical attention:

- If any cut, abrasion or skin wound you have is becoming more red, painful or swollen with time, is associated with fever, drains fluid or becomes pus filled.
- If you develop ANY red, painful, tender, warm areas on your skin especially those that quickly spread or worsen.
- If any cuts, abrasions or skin wounds you suffer are especially deep, severe or contaminated with dirt.
- If you develop a cough with fever and/or chest pain.
- If you develop painful, red, swollen joints associated with fever.
- If you develop back pain with fever.

Remember: rapid identification of possible MRSA infections can 1) decrease the chances that they will develop into more serious, complicated infections and 2) limit the spread of MRSA to others.

You can find more information including FAQs about MRSA at:

http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_mrsa_ca_public.html

Finally, DON'T WORRY!