



# How to Prevent MRSA Infection

Three Parts: [Understanding MRSA](#) [Protecting Yourself](#) [Preventing the Spread of MRSA](#)

Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA) is a staph bacteria that is resistant to most antibiotics. While most staph bacteria live on your skin and in your nose without causing any problems, MRSA is different because it cannot be treated using common antibiotics like methicillin. Practicing good hygiene is the best way to protect yourself and your family from getting this potentially dangerous bacterial infection, but there are other important measures you should take as well. See Step 1 to learn more.

Part  
1

## Understanding MRSA

**1 Know how it spreads.** MRSA is usually spread to patients in hospital settings by other human hands - usually those of a healthcare professional who has touched someone with the infection. Since hospital patients frequently have weakened immune systems, they are particularly susceptible to getting an infection. While this is by far the most common way that MRSA gets spread, it's also possible to contract it in other ways.<sup>[1]</sup> For instance:

- MRSA can be spread when someone touches a contaminated object, like hospital equipment.
- MRSA can be spread between people who use each other's personal items, like towels and razors.
- MRSA can be spread between people who use the same equipment, like sports equipment and showers in athletes' locker rooms.

**2 Understand why it's dangerous.** MRSA is actually carried by 30% of healthy people without them even knowing it.<sup>[2]</sup> It lives inside the human nose, and often doesn't cause a problem, or leads to only minor infections. However, when it does take hold over a weakened immune system, MRSA does not respond to most antibiotics. This makes it very difficult to contain once the infection has begun to have negative effects.

- MRSA can cause pneumonia, boils, abscesses, and infections of the skin. It can also get into the bloodstream and lead to serious health problems.

**3 Know who's at risk.** People in hospitals - especially those who have had a surgical procedure of some kind, which leaves their bodies prone to getting an infection - have been at risk of getting MRSA for decades. Hospitals and other medical facilities now have protocols in place to decrease the risk of patients getting MRSA, but it is still a problem. A new strain of MRSA now affects healthy people outside of hospitals - especially in school locker rooms, where children tend to share equipment.<sup>[3]</sup>

Part  
2

## Protecting Yourself

**1 Be a part of your healthcare team.**<sup>[4]</sup> If you're a patient in a hospital, don't leave it all up to the medical personnel to take all the right precautions. Even people doing their best to keep their patients safe make mistakes every once in a while, which is why it's important for you to take the initiative to control your own environment. Here's how to do it:

- Hospital staff should always wash their hands or use hand sanitizer before touching you. If someone is about to touch you without first taking this precaution, ask them to wash and use hand sanitizer. Don't be afraid to speak up for yourself.
- Make sure that your IV tubes and catheters are inserted under sterile conditions - that is, that the person inserting them wears a mask and sterilizes your skin beforehand. Places where the skin is pierced are prime entry points for MRSA.
- If the conditions of your room or the equipment being used seem unsanitary, alert hospital staff.
- Always ask visitors to wash their hands, and ask people who aren't feeling well to visit another time, when

they're better.<sup>[5]</sup>

**2 Maintain good hygiene.** Keep germs off your hands by washing them with soap and warm water or using a hand sanitizer containing at least 62% alcohol. When washing hands, scrub them briskly for 15 seconds and dry them with a paper towel. Use a separate paper towel to turn off the faucet.<sup>[6]</sup>

- Be especially careful to wash your hands frequently in healthcare facilities, schools, and other public places.
- Teach your children to wash their hands correctly.

**3 Be proactive.** If you are being treated for a skin infection, ask your doctor if you should be tested for MRSA. Otherwise, he or she may prescribe medications that don't work on antibiotic-resistant staph, which may delay treatment and create more resistant germs. Getting tested may bring you closer to getting the antibiotic you need to treat your infection.

- A general willingness to speak up in healthcare facilities is important when it comes to protecting yourself from MRSA. Don't assume that your doctor knows what's best.

**4 Use antibiotics properly.** Take *all* of the prescribed doses of an antibiotic, even if your infection is healing. Don't stop unless your doctor tells you to.

- Improper antibiotic use contributes to the bacteria's ability to resist the medicine causing them to morph against antibiotics that have the same composition as Methicillin. That's why strict adherence to antibiotic schedule, even if you're well, is advised.
- Throw away antibiotics after you have used them. Don't use antibiotics that were used by someone else or share your antibiotics with others.
- If you've been taking an antibiotic for a few days and your infection has not improved, consult your doctor.

**5 Warn children not to go near anyone's cuts or band-aids.** Children are more apt than adults to poke someone's cut, leaving both the child and the other person at risk of getting exposed to MRSA. Tell your children that touching someone where they're bandaged should not be done.

**6 Keep high-traffic areas sanitized.** Regularly clean and disinfect the following high risk rooms and surfaces at home and in schools:

- Any and all sports equipment that comes into contact with more than one person (helmet chin guards, mouthpieces)
- Locker room surfaces
- Kitchen counter tops
- Bathroom counter tops, toilets and any other surface that has come into contact with an infected person's skin
- Hairdressing facilities
- Daycare facilities

**7 Shower immediately after sports games and practices using soap and water.** Many teams share equipment like helmets and jerseys. If this is true for your team, take a shower as soon as practice is over, every time. Remember not to share towels.

### Part 3 Preventing the Spread of MRSA

**1 Know the symptoms of MRSA.** According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, symptoms include staph infections that appear as a bump or infected area on the skin that may be red, swollen, painful, warm to touch, full of pus and usually accompanied by fever. If you know yourself to be an MRSA carrier, even if you don't have a live infection, it's important to prevent it from spreading to other people.

- If you think you may have MRSA, have your doctor test the site to determine what type of infection you have.
- Don't hesitate to act if you are concerned. If you suspect you have an infection, it is not going away, or it is getting worse go to the hospital. MRSA spreads quickly through the body.

**2 Wash your hands frequently.** If you have MRSA, washing your hands is vitally important. Wash with soap and warm water, and do so each time you enter or leave a medical facility.

**3 Cover cuts and scrapes with a clean and sterile bandage immediately.** Keep them covered until they heal. The pus from infected sores could contain MRSA, so keeping your wounds covered will prevent the spread of bacteria. Be sure to change your bandages frequently, and throw them away carefully so that no one else will be exposed to them.

**4 Don't share your personal items with others.** Avoid sharing personal items like towels, sheets, athletic equipment, clothing and razors. MRSA spreads through contaminated objects in addition to direct contact.

**5 Sanitize your linens when you have a cut or sore.** You can do this by washing your towels and bed linens in a washing machine set on "hot". Wash your gym clothes after each time you wear them.

**6 Tell your healthcare providers that you have MRSA.** This is information they need to know to protect themselves and other patients. Be sure to tell your doctors, nurses, dentist, and any other medical personnel with whom you come into contact.

### Tips

- Disinfectants are specifically registered with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and contain ingredients that actually destroy bacteria and other germs. Before you purchase a disinfectant, check the product label to make sure it says "Disinfectant" and has an EPA registration number.

### Warnings

- Do not share any clothing, cosmetics, makeup, shoes or hats.
- It can spread through your body to your internal organs, liver and heart.
- It is not advisable to attempt to treat yourself.
- You must seek medical attention.
- MRSA is on the rise and causing infections and sometimes death.

### Sources and Citations

1. <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/mrsa/in-depth/mrsa/art-20047876>
2. [http://www.health.harvard.edu/press\\_releases/protect-yourself-from-the-MRSA-superbug](http://www.health.harvard.edu/press_releases/protect-yourself-from-the-MRSA-superbug)
3. <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/mrsa/in-depth/mrsa/art-20047876>

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