

# PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

## MRSA

Burlington County Health Department 15 Pioneer Blvd. Westampton, NJ 08060  
Telephone (609) 265-5548 Fax (609) 265-3152

### **What is MRSA?**

MRSA refers to a type of bacteria (*Staphylococcus aureus*) that is resistant to many antibiotics. It is a common cause of hospital-acquired infections.

### **Who gets MRSA?**

Anyone can get MRSA, but it is found most often in hospitalized patients.

### **What are the symptoms associated with MRSA infection?**

MRSA infections can cause a broad range of symptoms depending on the part of the body that is infected. These may include surgical wounds, burns, catheter sites, eye, skin and blood. Infection often results in redness, swelling and tenderness at the site of infection. Sometimes, people may carry MRSA without having any symptoms. When people become infected outside of the hospital, symptoms usually consist of a pimple or boil.

### **How is it transmitted?**

The staph bacteria are generally spread through direct contact with a person who is infected with or carrying the organism. Occasionally, MRSA may be spread by contact with surfaces or objects.

### **How long can an infected person carry MRSA?**

Some people can carry MRSA for days to many months, even after their infection has been treated.

### **How are MRSA infections diagnosed?**

MRSA infections can be diagnosed when a doctor obtains a sample or specimen from the site of infection and submits it to a laboratory. The laboratory places the specimen on a special "culture" plate containing nutrients, incubates the plate in a warmer and then identifies the bacteria. The final step is for the laboratory to conduct tests using various antibiotics to determine if the bacteria are resistant (able to withstand or tolerate) or sensitive (susceptible to killing) to select antibiotics.

### **What is the treatment for MRSA?**

Most MRSA infections are treated with basic wound care. More severe cases can usually be treated with an antibiotic called vancomycin. Newer antibiotics are being developed to address this problem.

### **How can the spread of MRSA be controlled?**

Careful hand washing is the single most effective way to control spread of MRSA. Health care workers should wash their hands after contact with each patient. If the patient is known to have an MRSA infection, the health care worker should wear disposable gloves. Depending on the type of contact, a gown should also be worn. Patients must also wash their hands to avoid spreading the bacteria to others.

In addition you should practice good hygiene daily:

1. Keep your hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and water or using an alcohol based hand sanitizer
2. Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healed
3. Avoid contact with other people's wound or bandages
4. Avoid sharing items such as towels, soap or razors

### **What about contact with carriers?**

If basic hygiene precautions are followed, MRSA carriers are not a hazard to others including their family and friends.

### **Can I get a staph or MRSA infection at my health club?**

It is possible to become infected by staph or MRSA at your health club by direct skin-to-skin contact with another person or by contact with surfaces or equipment (less likely). You can protect yourself from infections by practicing good hygiene by:

- keeping your hands clean by washing with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand rub and showering after working out;
- covering any open skin area such as abrasions or cuts with a clean dry bandage;
- avoiding sharing personal items such as towels, soaps or razors;
- using a barrier (e.g., clothing or a towel) between your skin and shared equipment;
- wiping surfaces of equipment before and after use.

### **Where can I get more information?**

- Your doctor, nurse or clinic
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at: <http://www.cdc.gov/>
- The Burlington County Department of Health at (609)265-5548
- The New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services (NJDHSS) at (609) 588-7500 or on the NJDHSS Website at <http://www.state.nj.us/health>