# Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA)

Frequently Asked Questions

## What is Staphylococcus aureus?

This bacteria, often called 'Staph', is one of the most common causes of skin infections in the U.S. Staph is usually found on the skin or in the noses of healthy people & does not always cause infection. When staph does cause infection, it usually is minor & results in pimples or boils. More serious infections of Staph (surgical wound infections or pneumonia) can occur & may require special antibiotics for treatment.

## What is MRSA?

Some staph bacteria are resistant to certain antibiotics. MRSA are resistant to the antibiotic methicillin & related antibiotics. Other antibiotics can be used to treat MRSA, but treatment may take longer and/or be more expensive. As with all regular staph infections, recognizing the signs & receiving treatment for skin infections in the early stages reduces the chances of the infection becoming severe.

## What are the symptoms of MRSA?

The symptoms of MRSA can include redness, warmth, swelling, tenderness of the skin, and boils or blisters. Some people may also have fever and chills. Staph infections are sometimes mistaken for spider bites.

## How does it spread?

It is spread by close contact with infected people. Staph can rub off of the skin of an infected person onto the skin of another infected person. Staph can also come off the infected skin of a person onto a shared object or surface, & get into the skin of the next person who uses or touches that object. Examples include: towels, soap, sheets, athletic equipment, clothes & benches in saunas or hot tubs.

## Who is at risk of developing MRSA?

MRSA infections are more common in people with the following risk factors: recurrent skin diseases or open wounds, been a patient in a hospital/health care setting within the last year, recent antibiotic use, spent time in crowded settings (gyms, jails, etc.)

## How is it diagnosed?

A sample of the area is taken & tested. A lab test can confirm if the infection is due to staph or MRSA.

## What should I do if I think I have it?

MRSA can only be diagnosed by a physician using lab tests. Many MRSA infections can be treated by draining the abscess or boil & may not require antibiotics, however, only healthcare providers should drain sores.

## How is it prevented?

- Know the signs of MRSA skin infections and get treated early
- Keep open cuts clean and covered
- Good hygiene such as cleaning hands regularly
- Avoid sharing personal items such as towels and razors

*For more information contact your doctor, refer to http://www.phila.gov/Health/ or contact the Philadelphia Department of Public Health, Division of Disease Control at 215-685-6740.*