



# PREMIER MEDICAL

## A S S O C I A T E S

This month's Health & Safety Page will cover MRSA, given the number of recent news stories covering the topic. We'll start the Nutrition series next month.

### Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA) Infections

It's not hard to miss a news story talking about the rise of MRSA infections lately. The recent tragic deaths of two children due to MRSA has left many people feeling panicked about what MRSA is, how it's treated, and how to prevent infections in our own families. Thankfully, most of these infections are minor and treatable, and there are easy steps that your family can take to prevent infection. Keep in mind that there are approximately 19,000 deaths per year attributed to MRSA. Influenza causes two to three times that number every year. This is not to minimize the potential severity of the disease, but it is not a disease that needs to cause overwhelming fear with each cut or scrape. (Don't forget to get those flu shots, though!)

Staphylococcus aureus, or staph, is a type of bacteria that can be found on the skin or in the nose of 25-30% of healthy people (in other words, they are colonized by the bacteria). When it causes illness, it usually causes minor skin infections such as pimples or boils. However, it can sometimes cause more serious infections, such as pneumonia, wound infections, and blood infections. People who are very ill, have problems with their immune system, have taken many antibiotics or are hospitalized for long periods of time are at highest risk of infection from staph. MRSA is staph that is resistant to several antibiotics, including methicillin, which is in the penicillin family. MRSA used to be a problem found mostly in hospitals and healthcare facilities, but now we are seeing more cases that are community-associated, which means the person infected had not been recently hospitalized or undergone a medical procedure (within the last year). MRSA spreads more frequently in the community when there is crowding, frequent skin-to-skin contact, exposure to cuts or abrasions, exposure to contaminated items or surfaces, and poor hygiene. It makes sense that clusters of these infections are seen among athletes, military recruits, correctional facilities and daycare settings.

MRSA infections usually cause skin infections that look like a pimple or boil, and can be red, swollen, painful, or have pus or other drainage. You should contact your healthcare provider should these symptoms occur, immediately if accompanied by fever or feeling ill. There *are* antibiotics that can be used to

treat these infections, and for minor infections, sometimes just incising and draining the boil is all that is needed (this should be done by your healthcare provider as well!) Realize that while there is potential for more serious infections, this is usually rare.

The most important way to protect yourself from MRSA is to practice good hygiene. Washing hands thoroughly with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer is important, especially after contact with cuts and scrapes, using the toilet or changing diapers, before and after preparing food or touching surfaces that come into direct contact with people's skin. It is also important not to share personal items, such as towels, clothing or razors. Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healed, and avoid contact with other people's wounds or bandages. It is also important not to insist on antibiotics to treat common colds or viral infections or ask for a stronger antibiotic, if it isn't recommended by your doctor. If you or a family member is being treated with antibiotics for a bacterial infection, complete the entire course of medication, and do not save the antibiotics to start at another time or share with another family member.

To summarize, teach your children to wash frequently and thoroughly (we will be reviewing correct hand-washing with them in school as well!), not to pick at scrapes, not to share towels and to wash if they come in contact with another person's cut or scrape. Clean any cuts and scrapes thoroughly, and keep these covered with a clean bandage. Watch for signs of red, painful, draining sores, pimples or boils, and contact your provider if you see these signs.

#### Patient Information

#### Medical Disclaimer

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