



MIDDLESEX COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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FACT SHEET

Methicillin Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) (Gym/Health Club)

What is MRSA?

Staphylococcal or “staph” bacteria are often found on the skin or in the noses of healthy people and do not usually cause illness. MRSA stands for methicillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*. These are staph bacteria that have become resistant to certain antibiotics, making them more difficult to treat.

Who can get a MRSA skin infection?

Anyone can get MRSA skin infections. They are more common among hospital patients, people in long term care facilities like nursing homes and prisons. Antibiotic resistant infections are becoming more common in the community. The infections occur among children and care givers in day care centers, athletes and people who inject “street” drugs.

How is MRSA spread?

Staph bacteria, including MRSA, are almost always spread by direct contact. Staph bacteria are not spread through the air. The bacteria can also spread when people come into contact with objects that have been contaminated with the bacteria. These objects include towels, clothing, bedding, gym or sports equipment and bandages.

Can I get a staph or MRSA infection at my gym/health club?

Although MRSA is mainly spread from person to person by direct skin contact, it is possible to come in contact with the bacteria by using shared gym equipment. To protect yourself from infections in the gym:

- Cover cuts, scratches or scrapes with a clean bandage.
- Place a towel or piece of clothing between your skin and surfaces of shared equipment such as mats or weight benches.
- Wipe surfaces of equipment before and after use.
- Don't share personal items such as razors and towels.
- Take a shower after you workout.
- If you can't take a shower, wash your hands with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand cleaner.

What are the symptoms of MRSA?

MRSA skin infections are generally minor, such as pimples, boils and other skin conditions. They are often mistaken for spider bites. Left untreated, these infections can get worse. These infections could spread to the bloodstream or lungs, causing serious illness and possibly death. If you suspect a MRSA skin infection, you should seek medical attention.

How is MRSA diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider may take a small sample of the infected area. This sample is sent to a laboratory and tested to see which antibiotics will be effective for treating the infection.

What is the treatment for MRSA?

Even though MRSA skin infections are resistant to certain antibiotics, early diagnosis and treatment can stop the infection from getting worse. Treatment of MRSA skin infections should include drainage of the wound (by your healthcare provider) when it is appropriate to do so. If antibiotics are needed, your healthcare provider will decide which antibiotic is best for your infection. Unless your doctor tells you otherwise, **TAKE ALL THE ANTIBIOTICS**, even if the infection is getting better. Follow all of your healthcare provider's instructions. In severe cases, surgery may be needed to cure the infection.

How can I prevent staph or MRSA infections?

- Keep your hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healed.
- Avoid contact with other people's wounds or bandages.
- Don't share personal items such as towels or razors.

Where can I get more information about MRSA?

- Your healthcare provider
- Your local health department
- The New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services website:
 - <http://www.state.nj.us/health/cd/mrsa/index.shtml>
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website:
 - http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/submenus/sub_mrsa.htm

Source of information:

New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services

http://www.state.nj.us/health/cd/mrsa/documents/mrsa_factsheet.pdf

http://www.state.nj.us/health/cd/mrsa/documents/mrsa_faq.pdf