

What is Staphylococcus aureus (staph)?

Staphylococcus aureus, often referred to simply as "staph," are bacteria commonly carried on the skin or in the nose of healthy people. Approximately 25% to 30% of the population is colonized (when bacteria are present, but not causing an infection) in the nose with staph bacteria. Sometimes, staph can cause an infection. Staph bacteria are one of the most common causes of skin infections in the United States. Most of these skin infections are minor (such as pimples and boils) and can be treated without antibiotics (also known as antimicrobials or antibacterials). However, staph bacteria also can cause serious infections (such as surgical wound infections, bloodstream infections, and pneumonia).

What is MRSA (methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus)?

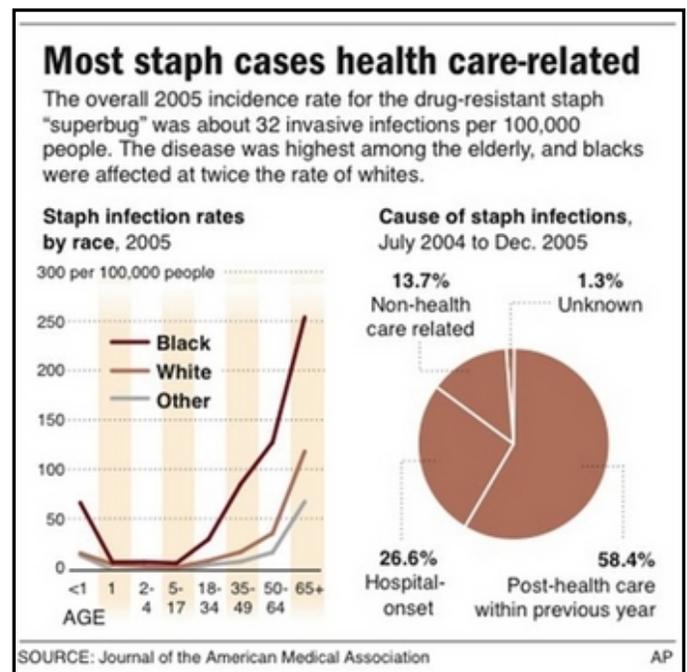
Some staph bacteria are resistant to antibiotics. MRSA is a type of staph that is resistant to antibiotics called beta-lactams. Beta-lactam antibiotics include methicillin and other more common antibiotics such as oxacillin, penicillin and amoxicillin. While 25% to 30% of the population is colonized with staph, approximately 1% is colonized with MRSA.

Who gets staph or MRSA infections?

Staph infections, including MRSA, occur most frequently among persons in hospitals and healthcare facilities (such as nursing homes and dialysis centers) who have weakened immune systems. These healthcare-associated staph infections include surgical wound infections, urinary tract infections, bloodstream infections, and pneumonia.

Are people who are positive for the human immune deficiency virus (HIV) at increased risk for MRSA? Should they be taking special precautions?

People with weakened immune systems, which include some patients with HIV infection, may be at risk for more severe illness if they get infected with MRSA.



People with HIV should follow the same prevention measures as those without HIV to prevent staph infections, including practicing good hygiene, cover wounds (e.g., cuts or abrasions) with clean dry bandages, avoid sharing personal items such as towels and razors, and contact their doctor if they think they have an infection.

How common are staph and MRSA infections?

Staph bacteria are one of the most common causes of skin infection in the United States and are a common cause of pneumonia, surgical wound infections, and bloodstream infections. The majority of MRSA infections occur among patients in hospitals or other healthcare settings; however, it is becoming more common in the community setting. Data from a prospective study in 2003, suggests that 12% of clinical MRSA infections are community-associated, but this varies by geographic region and population.

What does a staph or MRSA infection look like?

Staph bacteria, including MRSA, can cause skin infections that may look like a pimple or boil and can be red, swollen, painful, or have pus or other drainage. More serious infections may cause pneumonia, bloodstream infections, or surgical wound infections.



If I have a staph, or MRSA skin infection, what can I do to prevent others from getting infected?

You can prevent spreading staph or MRSA skin infections to others by following these steps:

1. **Cover your wound.** Keep wounds that are draining or have pus covered with clean, dry bandages. Follow your healthcare provider's instructions on proper care of the wound. Pus from infected wounds can contain staph and MRSA, so keeping the infection covered will help prevent the spread to others. Bandages or tape can be discarded with the regular trash.
2. **Clean your hands.** You, your family, and others in close contact should wash their hands frequently with soap and warm water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, especially after changing the bandage or touching the infected wound.
3. **Do not share personal items.** Avoid sharing personal items such as towels, washcloths, razors, clothing, or uniforms that may have had contact with the infected wound or bandage. Wash sheets, towels, and

clothes that become soiled with water and laundry detergent. Drying clothes in a hot dryer, rather than air-drying, also helps kill bacteria in clothes.

4. **Talk to your doctor.** Tell any healthcare providers who treat you that you have or had a staph or MRSA skin infection.

Preventing Staph Infections

How can I prevent staph or MRSA skin infections?

Practice good hygiene:

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 wounds or bandages.
4. Avoid sharing personal items such as towels or razors.

More Information:

CDC: <http://www.cdc.gov>

(Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Website, October, 2007)