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What is MRSA?

MRSA stands for “**m**ethicillin-**r**esistant *Staphylococcus aureus*.” MRSA is a kind of *Staphylococcus aureus* bacteria, that is resistant to some kinds of antibiotics, meaning that not all antibiotics can cure the infection. MRSA is resistant to a family of antibiotics related to penicillin that includes antibiotics called methicillin, and it can be resistant to other antibiotics as well. Most people who have *Staphylococcus aureus* on their skin do not have infection or illness caused by these bacteria. These people are “colonized” with *Staphylococcus aureus*. Infections start when these bacteria get into a cut, scrape or other break in the skin.

Pronunciation: MRSA is sometimes said as a single word, “mersa,” or by saying all four letters, “M-R-S-A.” Either way is correct.

Why is MRSA a problem for schools?

There are several reasons why schools are concerned about MRSA.

- MRSA infections are becoming more common in community settings, including schools.
- MRSA can be spread by direct contact. In school settings, there are many opportunities for direct contact among students, especially those on athletic teams.
- MRSA outbreaks can cause anxiety for parents, students and staff.
- Identifying a MRSA infection can be difficult because the signs and symptoms of MRSA infection are similar to those of other skin infections.
- MRSA can only be diagnosed by laboratory testing that includes information about which antibiotics will most likely be effective in treatment.
- Misdiagnosis or delayed diagnosis of MRSA infection can result in serious complications.

What does a staph or MRSA infection look like?

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.

How is MRSA spread?

MRSA is spread by direct skin-to-skin contact, such as shaking hands, wrestling, or other direct contact with the skin of another person. MRSA can also be spread by contact with items that have been touched by people with infection, like towels shared after bathing and drying off, or shared athletic equipment in the gym or on the field.

How are MRSA infections treated?

Most MRSA infections are treated by good wound and skin care: keeping the area clean and dry, washing hands after caring for the area, carefully disposing of any bandages and allowing the body to heal. Sometimes treatment requires the use of antibiotics. If antibiotics are needed, it is important for the patient to use the medication as directed unless the healthcare provider says to stop. If the infection has not improved within a few days after starting antibiotics, the student should contact the provider again.

Which groups in the school are most at risk for MRSA infection?

Factors that have been associated with the spread of MRSA skin infections include close skin-to-skin contact, openings in the skin such as cuts or abrasions, contaminated items and surfaces, crowded living conditions and poor personal hygiene. School athletic teams have reported MRSA infections and some colleges have reported MRSA infection cases in residential dormitories.

Should a student or staff member with MRSA be at school?

Yes, students and staff with a MRSA infection can attend school regularly as long as the wound is covered and they are receiving proper treatment. Students and staff do not need to be isolated or sent home in the middle of the day if a suspected MRSA infection is noticed.

What should I do if a student or staff member at my school is reported to have MRSA?

Do not panic and follow routine infection control precautions. Wash your hands regularly with soap and water. Wear gloves when handling the student, or touching blood, body fluids, secretions, excretions and any items contaminated with these fluids.

If a student or staff member with MRSA attends school does the school need to close or undergo a special cleaning?

No, follow routine procedures for cleaning the school with a freshly prepared solution of commercially available cleaner such as detergent, disinfectant-detergent or chemical germicide.

What should I do if more than one student in my school is reported to have MRSA?

Follow the guidelines above. In addition, please contact the New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) (505-827-0006) if you suspect more than one case of MRSA at your school.

Do I need to alert parents and staff members if a student has a MRSA infection?

Typically, it is not necessary to inform the entire school community about a MRSA infection. If there are questions about alerting parents or staff please consider consulting with NMDOH (505-827-0006) prior to parent/staff notification.

To prevent MRSA infections at the school, consider these guidelines:

- Regular handwashing is the best way to prevent getting and spreading staph/MRSA. Encourage and practice [hand hygiene](#).
- Practice and encourage good skin care. Since staph infections start when staph enter the body through a break in the skin, keeping skin healthy and intact is an important preventative measure.
- Ensure access to sinks, soaps, and clean towels.
- Ensure the availability of alcohol-based hand sanitizers, if soap and water are not accessible.
- Encourage daily showers with soap and water.
- Discourage sharing of personal items such as towels, razors, and toothbrushes.
- Regularly clean sinks, showers, and toilets by saturating with disinfectant.
- Disinfect athletic equipment between users.
- Launder sheets, towels, sports uniforms, and underclothing with hot water and detergent, and dry on the hottest setting.
- Wear gloves when handling dirty laundry.
- Wear gloves when caring for another person's wounds, and protect clothing from touching wounds or bandages.
- Encourage those infected to always keep draining lesions covered with dressings.
- Dispose of dressings containing pus and blood carefully.
- Disinfect contaminated portable equipment such as stethoscopes, blood-pressure cuffs, equipment handles, tourniquets, pagers, and cell phones.

Are there special considerations for students with immune suppression?

Students with weakened immune systems may be at risk for more severe illness if they get infected with MRSA. These students should follow the same prevention measures as all others to prevent skin infections, including practicing good personal hygiene, covering wounds (e.g., cuts or abrasions) with clean dry bandages, avoiding sharing personal items such as towels and razors, and contacting their doctor if they think they have an infection.

Additional Information: <http://www.cdc.gov/Features/MRSAinSchools/>