

# Superbug Staph Spread in Community

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**MRSA**, or methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus, is a bacterium that can cause serious infections. It is resistant to numerous antibiotics of the beta-lactam family, including methicillin and penicillin.

MRSA belongs to the large group of bacteria known as Staphylococci, often referred to as Staph. About 25%-30% of all people have Staph within the nose, but it normally does not cause an infection. In contrast, only about 1% of the population have MRSA.

Infections with MRSA are most common in hospitals and other institutional health-care settings, such as nursing homes, where they tend to strike older people, those who are very ill, and people with a weakened immune system. In health-care settings, MRSA is a frequent cause of surgical wound infections, urinary tract infections, bloodstream infections (sepsis), and pneumonia.

MRSA outbreaks, however, are appearing increasingly in the community. Infections can occur in people who have not been hospitalized or had a medical procedure performed in the past year, and who do not have immune deficiency. These infections are termed community-associated MRSA infections (CA-MRSA). The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that about 12% of MRSA infections are now community-associated, but this percentage can vary by community and patient population.

Community-associated MRSA infections usually affect the skin, causing pimples and boils in otherwise healthy people. Infected areas may be red, swollen, painful, and have pus or other drainage.

MRSA is typically transmitted from people with active MRSA infections. MRSA and other staph infections are primarily transmitted by the hands, which may become contaminated by contact with colonized or infected people or items or surfaces contaminated with body fluids containing MRSA. Skin-to-skin contact, cuts or abrasions of the skin, contaminated items and surfaces, crowded living conditions, and poor hygiene have all been associated with the transmission of MRSA in the community.

If you believe you have a Staph infection, visit your health-care provider. Most Staph and MRSA infections can be treated with antibiotics, but skin lesions may also be treated by drainage of the lesion under sterile conditions. MRSA infections that have been treated can recur and require further treatment.

**Good hygiene is the most effective way to prevent MRSA infections and to prevent the recurrence of treated lesions. Hands should be kept clean by frequent washings or use of hand-sanitizer lotions. Openings in the skin such as cuts should be kept clean and covered until healed. Contact with other people's skin wounds should be avoided, and personal care items such as towels and razors should not be shared with others.**