



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Practicing good hygiene can help prevent MRSA infections

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Alabama Department of Public Health advises that steps can be taken to help prevent infections from Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, known as MRSA. MRSA infections have been increasing in otherwise healthy people in the past few years.

The risk of MRSA infections can be lowered by practicing good hygiene:

1. Practice good handwashing with either soap and water or use of an alcohol-based hand sanitizer when soap and water are not readily available. Handwashing is the number one way to prevent the spread of germs.
2. Do not share personal items such as towels, washcloths, razors, athletic uniforms, or other clothing which may have had contact with a wound or bandage. Wash soiled clothes or linens with hot water and laundry detergent and dry in a hot dryer.
3. Avoid contact with the wounds or bandages of other people. If contact is necessary, wear disposable gloves and wash hands immediately after removal of the gloves. The used gloves and dressings can be disposed of with other household trash.
4. Keep all cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a dressing or bandage until healed. Follow your healthcare provider's instructions on proper care of the wound.

MRSA, better known as "staph," are bacteria commonly carried on the skin or in the nose of healthy people. Approximately 25 to 30 percent of the general population is colonized. That means that bacteria are present, but are not causing an infection. "Staph" may cause minor infections such as pimples or boils or may cause more serious infections such as wound infections, bloodstream infections and pneumonia.

Methicillin is one of the antibiotics which has routinely been used to treat staph infections, but over the years staph have developed resistance and so methicillin can no longer be used to treat all staph infections.

MRSA infections have historically been associated with individuals who have weakened immune systems and develop infections during their treatment at hospitals, long term care facilities, dialysis units and other healthcare facilities. But MRSA infections are now being diagnosed in individuals who have no recent history of treatment in a healthcare facility. These infections, referred to as community-associated MRSA, or CA-MRSA, are usually skin infections, such as pimples and boils, and occur in otherwise healthy people. Unfortunately, the CA-MRSA strain is more likely to cause severe illness.

Factors which have been associated with the spread of CA-MRSA include: close skin-to-skin contact, openings in the skin such as cuts or abrasions, contaminated items and surfaces, crowded living conditions and poor health. In Alabama and nationwide, outbreaks of CA-MRSA have occurred within athletic team members (football and soccer), daycare facilities, on college campuses, in prisons and in the general community.

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