



# Cape May County Department of Health 4 Moore Road, Cape May Court House, NJ 08210

## Staph and MRSA Skin Infections Fact Sheet for Schools

### What is a staph/MRSA skin infection?

Staphylococcus or “staph” bacteria are often found in people’s noses and on their skin. Usually, staph bacteria don’t cause any harm, but sometimes they get inside the body through a break in the skin and cause an infection. Most of these skin infections are minor (such as pimples and boils) and can be treated without antibiotics. However, staph bacteria also can cause serious infections that require hospitalization. Symptoms of a staph infection include redness, warmth, swelling, pus, tenderness of the skin, pimples, boils, or blisters. When common antibiotics don’t kill staph bacteria, it means the bacteria have become resistant to those antibiotics. This type of staph is called MRSA (Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus Aureus*).

### How do staph/MRSA skin infections spread?

Anybody can get a staph infection. Drainage from skin lesions can spread the bacteria to other parts of the body or to other persons through skin-to-skin contact. Staph from an infected person can also get onto a shared item or surface, and then get onto the skin of the person who touches it next.

### What should I do if a student in my school is reported to have MRSA?

Consider taking the following steps:

- Confirm the diagnosis. This may require contacting the student’s doctor or family.
- Follow routine infection control precautions:
  - Wear gloves when handling the student and any potentially contaminated items. Gloves should be removed immediately after use, and handwashing performed.
  - Linens (e.g., from cots) that may contain infectious fluids should be handled to prevent exposure.
  - Contaminated dressings should be placed in a plastic bag before discarding.
- Follow routine procedures for cleaning the environment.

School attendance: Students and staff with a MRSA infection can attend school if wounds are covered and they are receiving proper treatment. Students and staff do not need to be isolated or sent home for

a suspected staph infection. The area should be washed with soap and water and lightly covered. The student should be encouraged to see their healthcare provider to confirm a MRSA infection and determine the course of treatment.

**Anyone with uncontained wound drainage or other infected body fluids (i.e. blood, saliva, or mucous) should be kept home from school or work until wound drainage or body fluids are contained**

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

Typically, it is not necessary to inform the entire school community about a MRSA infection. The school nurse or physician should determine whether some or all parents and staff should be notified. When necessary, consult with the Cape May County Department of Health.

### How can MRSA be prevented in the school setting?

- Encourage students and staff to wash their hands after using rest rooms, before eating or drinking, after covering sneezes or coughs, and before and after exercising.
- Provide adequate hand washing supplies, including liquid soap dispensers rather than soap bars, and paper towels for single use instead of multiple use cloth towels.
- Ensure that open wounds or sores are covered with bandages or dressings until no drainage is present.
- Immediately clean any item or surface that comes in contact with blood, other body fluids, or wound drainage.
- Ensure that common areas (i.e. cafeterias, rest rooms, locker rooms, common work stations) are cleaned regularly.

### What are the reporting requirements for MRSA?

Any cluster of illness is reportable to the Cape May County Department of Health (465-1200). An individual case of MRSA is not reportable.

Fact sheet adapted from the Wisconsin Division of Public Health and the Massachusetts Department of Public Health

For more information contact the Cape May County Department of Health at 465-1200 or [www.cmchealth.net](http://www.cmchealth.net)

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Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - Your Online Source for Credible Health  
Information

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## CDC Features

## Other Features

- [MRSA in Schools](#)
- [Cancer Report](#)
- [Spina Bifida](#)
- [SHPPS 2006](#)
- [CDC en Español](#)
- [Previous Features](#)

## Questions and Answers about Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) in Schools



Answers to commonly asked questions about preventing the spread of methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* skin infections.

CDC, along with parents and school officials, wants to do everything possible to protect students from MRSA skin infections. These are commonly asked questions that will help parents and school officials prevent the spread of MRSA in schools.

## MRSA Facts

- [What type of infection does MRSA cause?](#)
- [How is MRSA transmitted?](#)
- [In what settings do MRSA skin infections occur?](#)
- [How do I protect myself from MRSA?](#)
- [Should schools close because of a MRSA infection?](#)

- **Should the school be closed to be cleaned or disinfected when an MRSA infection occurs?**
- **Should the entire school community be notified of every MRSA infection?**
- **Should the school be notified that my child has an MRSA infection?**
- **Should students with MRSA skin infections be excluded from attending school?**
- **I have an MRSA skin infection. How do I prevent spreading it to others?**

### **What type of infections does MRSA cause?**

- In the community most MRSA infections are skin infections that may appear as pustules or boils which often are red, swollen, painful, or have pus or other drainage. These skin infections commonly occur at sites of visible skin trauma, such as cuts and abrasions, and areas of the body covered by hair (e.g., back of neck, groin, buttock, armpit, beard area of men).
- Almost all MRSA skin infections can be effectively treated by drainage of pus with or without antibiotics. More serious infections, such as pneumonia, bloodstream infections, or bone infections, are very rare in healthy people who get MRSA skin infections.

### **How is MRSA transmitted?**

- MRSA is usually transmitted by direct skin-to-skin contact or contact with shared items or surfaces that have come into contact with someone else's infection (e.g., towels, used bandages).

### **In what settings do MRSA skin infections occur?**

- MRSA skin infections can occur anywhere.
- Some settings have factors that make it easier for MRSA to be transmitted.
  - These factors, referred to as the 5 **C**'s, are as follows: **C**rowding, frequent skin-to-skin **C**ontact, **C**ompromised skin (i.e., cuts or abrasions), **C**ontaminated items and surfaces, and lack of **C**leanliness.
  - Locations where the 5 C's are common include schools, dormitories, military barracks, households, correctional facilities, and daycare centers.

## How do I protect myself from getting MRSA?

- You can protect yourself by:



- practicing good hygiene (e.g., keeping your hands clean by washing with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer and showering immediately after participating in exercise);
- covering skin trauma such as abrasions or cuts with a clean dry bandage until healed;
- avoiding sharing personal items (e.g., towels, razors) that come into contact with your bare skin; and using a barrier (e.g., clothing or a towel) between your skin and shared equipment such as weight-training benches;
- maintaining a clean environment by establishing cleaning procedures for frequently touched surfaces and surfaces that come into direct contact with people's skin.

## Should schools close because of an MRSA infection?

- The decision to close a school for any communicable disease should be made by school officials in consultation with local and/or state public health officials. However, in most cases, it is not necessary to close schools because of an MRSA infection in a student. It is important to note that MRSA transmission can be prevented by simple measures such as hand hygiene and covering infections.



## Should the school be closed to be cleaned or disinfected when an MRSA infection occurs?

- **Covering infections will greatly reduce the risks of surfaces becoming contaminated with MRSA.** In general it is not necessary to close schools to "disinfect" them when MRSA infections occur. MRSA skin infections are transmitted primarily by skin-to-skin contact and contact with surfaces that have come into contact with someone else's infection.
- When MRSA skin infections occur, cleaning and disinfection should be performed on surfaces that are likely to contact uncovered or poorly covered infections.
- Cleaning surfaces with detergent-based cleaners or Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered disinfectants is effective at removing MRSA from the environment.
  - It is important to read the instruction labels on all cleaners to make sure they are used safely and appropriately.
  - Environmental cleaners and disinfectants should not be used to treat infections.

- The EPA provides a list of EPA-registered products effective against MRSA:

<http://epa.gov/oppad001/chemregindex.htm>

### **Should the entire school community be notified of every MRSA infection?**

- Usually, it should not be necessary to inform the entire school community about a single MRSA infection. When an MRSA infection occurs within the school population, the school nurse and school physician should determine, based on their medical judgment, whether some or all students, parents and staff should be notified. Consultation with the local public health authorities should be used to guide this decision.
- Remember that staphylococcus (staph) bacteria, including MRSA, have been and remain a common cause of skin infections.

### **Should the school be notified that my child has an MRSA infection?**

- Consult with your school about its policy for notification of skin infections.

### **Should students with MRSA skin infections be excluded from attending school?**

- Unless directed by a physician, students with MRSA infections should not be excluded from attending school.
  - Exclusion from school should be reserved for those with wound drainage ("pus") that cannot be covered and contained with a clean, dry bandage and for those who cannot maintain good personal hygiene.
- Students with active infections should be excluded from activities where skin-to-skin contact is likely to occur (e.g., sports) until their infections are healed.



### **I have an MRSA skin infection. How do I prevent spreading it to others?**

- Cover your wound. Keep wounds that are draining or have pus covered with clean, dry bandages until healed. Follow your healthcare provider's instructions on proper care of the wound. Pus from infected wounds can contain staph, including MRSA, so keeping the infection covered will help prevent the spread to others. Bandages and tape can be discarded with the regular trash.
- Clean your hands frequently. You, your family, and others in close contact should wash their hands frequently with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, especially after changing the bandage or touching the infected wound.
- 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. Use a dryer to dry clothes completely.

### **Practical Advice for Teachers**

- If you observe children with open draining wounds or infections, refer the child to the school nurse.
- Enforce hand hygiene with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizers (if available) before eating and after using the bathroom.

### **Advice for School Health Personnel**

- Students with skin infections may need to be referred to a licensed health care provider for diagnosis and treatment. School health personnel should notify parents/guardians when possible skin infections are detected.
- Use standard precautions (e.g., hand hygiene before and after contact, wearing gloves) when caring for nonintact skin or potential infections.
- Use barriers such as gowns, masks and eye protection if splashing of body fluids is anticipated.

### **Learning More**

#### **MRSA in Healthcare Settings**

- [Overview of MRSA in Healthcare Settings](#)
- [Fact Sheet for Healthcare Personnel](#)
- [MRSA Prevention Healthcare Guideline](#) 
- [Hand Hygiene Healthcare Guideline](#)

## MRSA in the Community

- [Overview of MRSA in the Community](#)
- [Information for the Public](#)
- [Information for Healthcare Providers](#)
- [Clinical Management Strategies](#) 
- [Educational Materials \(Posters and Information Sheet\)](#)

## Other Resources

- [Questions and Answers about MRSA for School Health Professionals\\*](#), Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Public Health
- [MRSA Toolkit for Middle & High Schools\\*](#), Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department
- [MRSA Facts for Schools\\*](#)  2 pages, 80KB) Connecticut Department of Public Health
- [Guidelines for Reducing the Spread of Staph/CAMRSA in Non-Healthcare Settings, v 2\\*](#)  3 pages, 735KB) Los Angeles County Department of Public Health
- [Strategies for Clinical Management of MRSA in the Community: Summary of an Experts' Meeting](#)  24 pages, 279KB)

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