

Prevent Super-Bug (MRSA) Infections

There has been growing concern in recent news reports about the death of a Virginia high school student due to a Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA) bacterial infection and outbreaks among high school students in Virginia and Maryland. MRSA is a type of bacteria that is resistant to nearly all antibiotics, and is known as the "super-bug." There are more than 84,000 MRSA infections in the United States each year, but the majority (85 percent) of infections are related to hospital settings.

MRSA is common and relatively harmless when in the nose or on the skin. The infection may look like a pimple or boil and may heal on its own. But when the bacterial infection becomes more than skin deep, it can be deadly and difficult to stop with current antibiotics.

This super-bug can live for weeks and can be spread by sharing contaminated towels, gym equipment, and any shared personal possessions, such as computer keyboards. Good personal hygiene and soap and water are the best preventive measures to stop the spread of these bacteria.

To reduce the transmission of these bacteria:

- Wash hands frequently using soap or a hand sanitizer (hand gel);
- Do not share towels (use paper hand towels);
- Do not share personal items like razors, or nail clippers, or soap;
- Regularly clean commonly touched surfaces, such as telephones, doorknobs, and light switches with disinfectants;
- Protect skin abrasions from infection by washing with soap and water, and then dry and cover with a clean bandage; and
- At the gym, protect legs and arms from abrasions by wearing appropriate clothing to cover the areas.

For additional information, contact Dr. Bonnie S. Richter, Director, Illness and Injury Prevention Programs, Office of Health, Safety and Security, at bonnie.richter@hq.doe.gov or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site at www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_mrsa.html

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