



Consumer Fact Sheet on MRSA- Hygiene for a Healthy Household®*

My doctor says I have a staph infection. Does that actually mean that I have MRSA?

No, not necessarily. “Staph” is short for *Staphylococcus aureus*, which is a type of bacterium that lives on the skin of 25-30% of the population at any given time. Most of the time, it doesn’t cause problems, but if it enters the body through a break in the skin, it can cause a “staph infection.” MRSA stands for Methicillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*. It is simply one type of staph infection, and the symptoms it causes are the same as the symptoms seen in other staph infections of the skin. The difference between MRSA and other forms of staph is that MRSA has become resistant to some types of antibiotics. This can make it more difficult to treat; however there *are* antibiotics available that can treat most MRSA infections. For more information on antibiotic resistance see www.apua.org.

I keep reading that MRSA is associated with poor hygiene. I wash my hands all the time, and keep my house clean, but I have MRSA. What am I doing wrong?

You are not doing anything wrong. Washing your hands is the best thing you can do to protect yourself from many infectious diseases, including MRSA. However, even people who clean their hands and homes often and well sometimes still get MRSA infections. Having MRSA does NOT mean you have poor hygiene.

How can I avoid getting an MRSA infection?

- The most important thing you can do to protect yourself from MRSA and other infectious diseases is to wash your hands often. When soap and water are not available, alcohol based hand sanitizer is a good substitute.
- MRSA can enter the body through small cuts and cracks in the skin’s surface, so take steps to keep your hands from getting dry and cracked.
- Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered until they are healed.
- Do not share personal items like towels, razors and washcloths.
- Disinfect frequently touched surfaces

If someone in my family has MRSA, does that mean that I need to disinfect everything in my house every day? What areas in the home should I clean more carefully?

You do not need to disinfect every area in your home every day, but targeted cleaning of surfaces in the kitchen, bathroom and nursery is appropriate. You will also want to take the additional steps of carrying out targeted disinfection of surfaces that have come in contact with MRSA infections and surfaces that people frequently touch. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Choose a cleaning product with a label that says it is also a disinfectant, and make sure to read the label carefully before using any product. Many disinfectants need to stay in contact with the surface you are cleaning for several minutes; if you just spray the cleaner and then wipe it off with a paper towel right away, it may not work.

- Cleaning can be hard on your hands, causing your skin to become dry or cracked. Wear gloves while doing extensive cleaning, in order to protect your skin. Remember, MRSA usually enters the body through a break in the skin, so extensive cleaning could do more harm than good if you don't take steps to protect your hands.
- Special attention should be paid to areas that have come into direct or indirect contact with an MRSA infection. For example, if you set a bandage that had been covering an infection on the bathroom counter before throwing it away, you should clean and disinfect that surface. You may also want to clean areas that people touch often, such as faucet handles and doorknobs.

I am concerned about getting MRSA at my gym or during sports practice. What can I do to prevent this?

- If you are worried about MRSA at your gym, you can use paper towels and disinfecting wipes to wipe down the surfaces of workout equipment before and after using it. You can also rinse your hands with alcohol based sanitizers after workout. Many gyms already provide these materials in workout areas. If yours does not, you can ask gym management staff to start supplying them.
- You may also place a towel between yourself and exercise equipment seats.
- Make sure cuts and scrapes are covered before working out or practicing a sport.
- If you get a cut or scrape while practicing, take a break to clean it and cover it up.
- Avoid sharing towels and other personal care items with other people.
- Take a shower after working out, especially if you are participating in a sport that involves physical contact with other people.

I will be going into the hospital for surgery soon. Is there anything I can do to reduce the risk of getting MRSA while I am there?

The best step you can take is to bring your own alcohol based hand sanitizer and/or politely ask people who come into your room to wash their hands or clean them with an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Don't be shy about asking doctors and nurses to do this. You can also ask your doctor what steps will be taken to reduce the risk of infection, and ask if there are other things you can do yourself to reduce the risk.

Since surface disinfectants kill MRSA effectively, can I help keep myself and my family healthy by using those disinfectants on my own skin? Can I spray family members or pets with these disinfectants?

No. This may seem like a logical step to try, but it will actually do much more harm than good. These products are not formulated to be used on humans or animals. They are composed of strong chemicals, and some of them can be absorbed into your body through your skin. They can also irritate your skin or cause it to develop tiny, sometimes invisible cracks. MRSA and other bacteria can enter through these small breaks in the skin. Always remember to follow cleaning product label instructions.