



MRSA and the Workplace

Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) refers to types of staph that are resistant to a type of antibiotic methicillin. MRSA is often resistant to other antibiotics, as well.

Staphylococcus aureus, often referred to simply as “staph,” is a type of bacteria commonly carried on the skin or in the nose of healthy people. Sometimes, staph can cause an infection. Staph bacteria are one of the most common causes of skin infections in the US. Most of these skin infections are minor and can be treated without antibiotics. However, staph bacteria also can cause serious infections such as surgical wound infections, bloodstream infections, and pneumonia.

MRSA infections that are acquired by persons who have not been recently hospitalized or had a medical procedure are known as community-associated MRSA infections. Staph or MRSA infections in the community are usually manifested as skin infections that look like pimples or boils and occur in otherwise healthy people.

Frequently Asked Questions for the Workplace

Can I get MRSA from someone at work?

MRSA is transmitted most frequently 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 as bandages). MRSA skin infections can occur anywhere. However, 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:

- Crowding, frequent skin-to-skin
- Contact
- Compromised skin (i.e., cuts or abrasions)
- Contaminated items and surfaces
- Lack of Cleanliness.



Locations where the 5 C’s are common include schools, dormitories, military barracks, households, correctional facilities, and daycare centers.

If I have MRSA, can I go to work?

Unless directed by a healthcare provider, workers with MRSA infections should not be routinely excluded from going to work.

- Exclusion from work should be reserved for those with wound drainage (“pus”) that cannot be covered and contained with a clean, dry bandage.
- Workers with infections should be excluded from activities where skin-to-skin contact with the affected skin area is likely to occur until their infections are healed.

If I have staph, or a MRSA skin infection, what can I do to prevent the spread of MRSA at work and at home?

You can prevent spreading staph or MRSA skin infections to others by following these steps:

- **Cover your wound.** Keep areas of the skin affected by MRSA covered. Keep wounds that are draining, or have pus, covered with clean, dry bandages.
- **Clean your hands.** You, your family, and others in close contact should wash their hands frequently with soap and warm 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 uniforms, clothing, towels, washcloths or razors that may have had contact with the infected wound or bandage.
- **Talk to your doctor.** Tell any healthcare providers who treat you that you have or had a staph or MRSA skin infection.

What can my boss (employers) do to prevent the spread of staph or MRSA at the workplace?

- Place importance on worker safety and health protection in the workplace.
- Ensure the availability of adequate facilities and supplies that encourage workers to practice good hygiene.
- Ensure that routine housekeeping is followed in the workplace.
- Ensure that contaminated equipment and surfaces are cleaned with detergent-based cleaners or Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered disinfectants.

~ National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health/CDC