

MRSA Q&A

Everyone has read in the news about cases of the “deadly” new infection that is “sweeping the country.” Here is my perspective on MRSA:

- Q: What is MRSA?
- A: MRSA stands for *Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus*. Staph Aureus is the most common form of bacteria on your skin, and usually causes no harm. MRSA is resistant to the usual antibiotics for Staph, and the form of MRSA in the news is more likely to cause skin infection than the usual Staph bacteria.
- Q: How does MRSA make you sick?
- A: The new form of MRSA is causing skin infections -- specifically, it causes abscesses (or “boils”), which is an area of redness and swelling. It most commonly causes them in the legs, but can be anywhere.
- Q: How is MRSA Treated?
- A: Usually if the abscesses are drained, they will get better on their own. If the skin itself is red and hot around the abscess (a condition known as “cellulitis”), then certain antibiotics can still be used to make it better.
- Q: Can MRSA be dangerous?
- A: What made the news recently was a fatal case in a teenager in Virginia, so yes, it can be dangerous. Yet it is extremely rare that it would get this bad. To be dangerous, it would need to be ignored for quite a while.

- Q: When did this start?
- A: We have been regularly seeing MRSA in this office for over 2 years. The news makes it seem like it has just hit our area, but that is inaccurate; we have been regularly seeing and treating it for quite some time. The news has finally picked up on this fact.

- Q: What caused it?
- A: Clearly, the over-use of antibiotics is partly to blame. Antibiotics do not treat viruses and they are not harmless if over-used. Yet there is a degree to which this would have happened anyhow, as it is in the nature of bacteria to adapt to their environment. If that environment has antibiotics in them, resistance happens. Resistance has been a problem ever since antibiotics were introduced during WW2.

- Q: What can be done to prevent it?
- A: Not much. It is prevalent in the community and will flare up in some people for unknown reasons. Good normal hygiene can help (taking showers). Hand sanitizers are not really helpful to fight it. The most important thing is to not ignore signs of infection when they arise.

- Q: Should I be worried?
- A: Yes and no. While the big picture of antibiotic resistance is serious and must be addressed on an international level, it is not an immediate threat to your health any more than other medical problems. There are much bigger issues, like good nutrition, exercise, and immunizations that have much bigger impacts on your life than being worried about MRSA.