

HOW WILL I KNOW IF I HAVE AN MRSA INFECTION?

Varsha Kishore, DO, FACOFP

Ronald Januchowski, DO, FACOFP, Editor • Paula Gregory, DO, MBA, CHCQM, FAIHQ, Health Literacy Editor



WHAT IS MRSA?

Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus or MRSA is a type of bacteria (germ) that can cause a very serious and difficult to treat infection. People carry many types of bacteria in their body and on their skin. The immune system is usually able to control these bacteria, so they do no harm. About 1 in 3 people carry the Staphylococcus aureus “Staph” bacteria on their skin. In these people, the bacteria usually cause no problems. However, if they get a cut or scrape, this can serve as an opening and home for infection. Initially, most of the germs were sensitive to penicillin. In the 1950s, many infections became resistant to penicillin and methicillin (a related drug developed to treat these germs). Thus, the term methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) was derived.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE AN MRSA INFECTION?

Many people carry MRSA on their skin without knowing it. This is called being “colonized.” You can pick up the germ by touching a person who has MRSA on his or her skin, being nearby when a person with MRSA breathes, coughs, or sneezes, or by touching a table, handle, or other surface that has the germ on it.

If you get a MRSA infection, you can develop some skin problems. You might have a red, tender lump, and it might ooze pus. On the other hand, you can have a cluster of bumps that look like pimples or insect bites. If the germ is on your skin and you cut yourself or have another injury, you can become infected. If the infection gets into the blood, it can give you a fever or make you feel tired or sick.

If you are concerned about MRSA, please see your osteopathic family physician. If your physician thinks you may have MRSA, he or she can take a swab/sample from your skin and check it for bacteria. In some cases, blood tests, x-rays, and other tests might be needed as well.

MEDICAL CARE & TREATMENT OPTIONS

Your physician can give you special antibiotics to treat your infection. If you are treated with antibiotics, it is very important that you follow the directions exactly. Take all the pills you are given, even if you feel better before you finish the pills. If you do not take them all, the bacteria could come back even stronger.

In addition to antibiotics, your healthcare provider may drain the infected area by inserting a needle or making a small cut in the skin. This is done to reduce the amount of infected material (pus), which will help the tissue to heal. You should not try to drain a boil or pimple on your own because this could worsen the infection.

Bad MRSA infections are usually treated with an intravenous (IV) medication. Your doctor may continue the IV antibiotic until your condition improves.

SOURCE(S): Red Book Online, Infectious Disease Society of America, UpToDate

The *Osteopathic Family Physician* Patient Handout is a public service of the ACOFP. The information and recommendations appearing on this page are appropriate in many instances; however, they are not a substitute for medical diagnosis by a physician. For specific information concerning your medical condition, ACOFP suggests that you consult your family physician. This page may be photocopied noncommercially by physicians and other healthcare professionals to share with their patients. For additional patient related educational material please visit our website at www.acofp.org.