



**STATE OF CONNECTICUT**  
**DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION**  
24 WOLCOTT HILL ROAD  
WETHERSFIELD, CONNECTICUT 06109

**Questions and Answers about MRSA**  
**For Correctional Professionals**

**What is MRSA?**

MRSA stands for methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*. It is a kind of *Staphylococcus aureus* ("staph") bacterium that is resistant to some antibiotics.

Many people think that MRSA is a "super bug" capable of causing unusually severe disease. However, any staph infection can cause severe disease. MRSA just needs to be identified and treated with different antibiotics, when antibiotic treatment is necessary. With proper treatment, MRSA can be treated successfully.

**What are the symptoms of a staph/MRSA infection?**

Pimples, rashes, pus-filled boils, especially when warm, painful, red or swollen, can mean that a person has a staph or MRSA skin infection. The only way to tell the difference between MRSA and other staph infections is with laboratory tests. Occasionally staph infections, including MRSA, can cause more serious problems such as surgical wound infections, blood stream infections and pneumonia. The symptoms can include high fever, swelling, heat and pain around a surgical wound, headache and fatigue.

**How are MRSA infections treated?**

Most MRSA infections are treated by good wound and skin care: keeping the area clean and dry, washing hands after caring for the area, carefully disposing of any bandages and allowing the body to heal. Sometimes treatment includes the use of antibiotics. If antibiotics are needed, it is important to use the medication as directed unless a doctor says to stop. If an infection has not improved within a few days after seeing a doctor, it is important to contact the doctor again.

**Is MRSA a problem in correctional facilities?**

Not necessarily in all facilities. Many people, including inmates and corrections officers, carry staph (including MRSA) in their nose or on their skin and do not know they are

carrying it. They do not get skin infections. They do not have any signs or symptoms of illness.

However, there are some conditions that can lead to MRSA/staph infections in prisons and jails, and in other settings where people have close contact and in which skin damage (cuts, scratches, scrapes) can occur.

### **What kinds of conditions can lead to a MRSA/staph infection in corrections?**

- 1. Direct contact:** *To get a MRSA or other staph infection, you first must get the bacteria on your skin or in your nose.* Staph, including MRSA, is spread by direct skin-to-skin contact. In correctional facilities, there may be regular, frequent direct contact among inmates and between inmates and corrections officers. For example, when one person shakes hands with another, tackles or wrestles with another person, gets “patted down”, or has some other direct contact with the skin of another person, staph can be passed from one person to another. This happens in any such situation where there is direct contact, not just in jails or prisons.

Staph infections can also spread by contact with items that have been used by people with staph on their skin, like towels, or athletic equipment shared in the gym or on the field.

- 2. Lack of handwashing:** Another condition that can lead to spread of MRSA and other staph infections is lack of handwashing. MRSA and other staph bacteria can be removed from your hands by washing with soap and water or by using a hand sanitizer. The best way to prevent skin infections, and many other infections, is to wash your hands frequently. Daily showering is helpful to remove bacteria from the skin. Wearing shower shoes can protect your feet from bacteria and fungi as well.
- 3. Cuts and scrapes:** MRSA and other staph need to get into the skin before an infection can occur, often through a scrape, scratch or other wound.
- 4. Dealing with infections:** People with MRSA or other staph infections - especially boils or wounds that have pus – can most easily spread staph infections to others. Skin infections should be taken seriously and treated appropriately.

### **What about family and friends outside the prison?**

It is normal to be concerned about spreading MRSA and other staph infections to family and friends outside the jail or prison. However your family and friends do not have a greater risk of getting infections from you just because you work in a correctional facility.

There are many ways to reduce the risk of spreading MRSA and other in staph infections, starting with good handwashing.

Keep in mind that many people, inside and outside of correctional facilities, carry staph on their skin and in their nose and to not have infections. These people are “colonized” with staph. In some places, such as hospital and nursing homes, MRSA and other staph infections are relatively common. In other words, there are many ways that people are exposed to MRSA and other staph infections.

If you work in a prison or jail, think about items that are handled or shared from one person to the next without washing, like clothes, towels, handcuffs, or even weights and sports equipment. This direct contact and sharing can allow bacteria like MRSA and other staph to spread.

### **How can MRSA be prevented and controlled in correctional facilities?**

Unfortunately, MRSA is becoming more common across the United States, in every community. As with other infectious diseases, basic infection control practices, our best defenses, should be followed:

#### **For corrections officers:**

- Practice good hand hygiene. Encourage inmates to practice proper handwashing as well.
- Encourage inmates to take regular showers with soap and warm water.
- Discourage sharing of personal items such as towels, razors, and toothbrushes.
- Be observant. Encourage inmates with skin lesions to follow up with the healthcare staff as soon as possible.
- Use appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE, for example gloves) whenever you expect to have contact with an inmate’s blood or body fluids.
- Follow your agency’s infection control policy.

#### **Other ways to reduce transmission:**

- Launder sheets, towels, uniforms, and underclothing with hot water and detergent and dry on the hottest setting or use a detergent which has the same effect.
- Wear gloves when handling dirty laundry.
- Ensure regular cleaning sinks, showers and toilets.

- Whenever possible, disinfect athletic equipment after each use.
- Use contact precautions (gloves) for wound care.
- Cover draining wounds and damaged skin (sores, cuts, scratches and scrapes) with bandages.
- Carefully dispose of bandages containing pus or blood.
- Disinfect contaminated portable equipment, such as stethoscopes, blood-pressure cuffs, equipment handles, tourniquets, handcuffs, shackles, pagers, and cell phones.

MRSA can survive on objects and surfaces such as linen, sinks, floors, medical equipment, and all surfaces commonly touched by the hands of inmates, corrections officers, and healthcare providers. Appropriate application of surface disinfectants (see package labeling) is recommended for environmental cleaning when MRSA is a concern.