



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

Questions and Answers about MRSA
For Inmates

What is MRSA?

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.

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

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.

Ask to see health services if you think you have a skin infection. They will decide what treatment is best.

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 health care professional tells you to stop. If an infection has not improved within a few days after seeing a health care staff, ask to see the healthcare staff 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.* Staph, including MRSA, is spread by direct skin-to-skin contact. In corrections 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 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 shared athletic equipment.

- 2. Lack of handwashing:** The best way to prevent skin infections, and many other infections is to wash your hands frequently. MRSA and other staph bacteria can be removed from your hands by washing with soap and water or by using a hand sanitizer. 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. MRSA can also enter the body when contamination equipment is used for tattooing and body piercing.
- 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. Ask to see the health services staff if you think you have one.

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 live in a correctional facility.

Your family and friends do not have a greater risk of getting infections from you just because you live 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.

How can MRSA be prevented and controlled in correctional facilities?

- Practice good hand hygiene. Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Take care of your skin and any cuts and scratches. If you notice any lumps or bumps do not try to open them yourself. Ask the health services staff to look at it as soon as possible.
- Avoid getting dry skin. Dry skin can crack and make an infection more likely.
- Do not share personal items such as towels, razors, and toothbrushes.
- Cover any damaged skin or draining wounds with a bandage
- Carefully dispose of bandages containing pus or blood.
- Use a barrier (shirt or pants) between your skin and equipment that is shared, like gym equipment.
- Take regular showers with soap and warm water.
- Request to see health services staff if you think you have a skin infection.

The best way to prevent MRSA infections, and many other infections, is to wash your hands frequently.