

# MRSA (Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus)

Live Well to  
Learn Well

Web:  
[health.cornell.edu](http://health.cornell.edu)

Phone (24/7):  
607-255-5155

Fax:  
607-255-0269

Appointments:  
Monday–Saturday

Check web for hours,  
services, providers,  
and appointment  
information

110 Ho Plaza,  
Ithaca, NY  
14853-3101

## What is a staph infection? What is MRSA?

“Staph,” or staphylococcus, is a common bacteria often found on the skin or in the nose of healthy people. If the bacteria enter under the skin through a cut or scrape, the staph bacteria may cause skin infections that look like pimples or boils. Infections caused by staph may be red, swollen, painful, or have pus or other drainage. Most staph infections are minor and can be treated without antibiotics.

Some staph infections resist treatment to a class of antibiotics and are known as Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus aureus or MRSA. This makes these infections harder to treat because it is resistant to the antibiotic most commonly used. There are however, a couple of other antibiotics to which the bacteria are susceptible and can be used to treat the infection.

## Who is at risk, and how is MRSA spread in the community?

Anyone can get MRSA on their body from contact with an infected wound or by sharing personal items (such as towels or razors) that have touched infected skin. MRSA infection risk can be increased when a person is in activities or places that involve crowding, skin-to-skin contact, and shared equipment or supplies. People who live in crowded settings, athletes, daycare and school children, and those who recently received inpatient medical care are at higher risk. The risk to the general public is still quite low.

## When should one seek medical attention?

Seeking timely attention for staph infections will reduce the chance of complications and spread of the infection to others. Anyone with a skin condition that is not improving or is spreading, becomes red and swollen or abscessed, is associated with a fever, or seems otherwise unusual should consult with a health care provider. Cornell students can make an appointment at Cornell Health or consult with a nurse about the need for an appointment by calling 607-255-5155.

## What can I do to reduce the risk of infection?

Good hygiene practices are the best way to reduce the risk of transmission of staph, MRSA, and most of the other germs that are present



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in our environment. Though there is very little risk to others from closed and well-covered skin infections, MRSA provides another reminder of the importance of following good basic hygiene techniques.

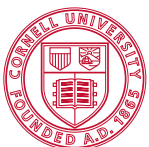
## Everyone

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water or an alcohol-based sanitizer.
- Keep cuts and abrasions clean and covered with a band aid or dressing until healed.
- Avoid contact with other people’s cuts, abrasions or soiled dressings.
- Avoid sharing personal items such as razors or towels.

## Athletes

Because athletes have a somewhat higher risk of staph infections, we recommend that Cornell athletes also:

- Shower and wash with soap after every practice or competition. Don’t share bar soap: use soap from dispensers or your own bar of soap.
- Wash promptly any abrasions such as turf burns, mat burns, or floor burns.
- Launder personal items such as towels, uniforms, supporters, etc. after each use.
- Avoid sharing towels, razors, and other personal items.
- Clean shared athletic equipment after each use (used commercial disinfectants or a solution of one tablespoon of bleach in one quart water).
- Be alert for any skin irritation. (Intercollegiate



athletes should report skin lesions to trainers/coaches who should be able to recognize wounds that are potentially infectious and need treatment.)

- Apply a topical antibiotic, such as bacitracin, and cover cuts and abrasions completely with clean dressing. Wash your hands before and after performing wound care.
- If potentially infected skin conditions cannot be adequately covered with dressings, delay sports participation until they can be.
- Cornell student athletes should direct their questions and concerns to athletic training or sports medicine staff. Anyone using Fitness Center facilities can talk with Fitness Center staff.

## Cornell community members

You can do something to help promote safer, healthier facilities and behaviors. Post these handwashing and hygiene messages (available on our website) in your work, study, or living area:

- *Wash Up* (pdf)
- *10 easy ways to stop the spread of germs* (pdf)
- *Sharing isn't always caring* (pdf)
- *Don't let infection get under your skin* (pdf)
- *Identifying MRSA* (pdf)
- *Take Care of Your Skin: Tips for Athletes* (pdf)

We will be happy to send posters to members of the Cornell community: call Cornell Health Communications at 607-255-4782.

## Cleaning of Cornell facilities

- Cornell Building Care staff utilize EPA registered disinfectants that are highly effective against MRSA and other communicable diseases in routine cleaning of Cornell facilities.
- Rooms do not need additional disinfecting treatment unless there was an open and draining wound with blood or pus. If this occurs, please contact the facility building manager who can take appropriate measures.

## More MRSA information

- *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)*
- *New York State Department of Health*