

# MRSA and the Workplace

Note: This information is for general workplaces, not healthcare facilities.

## What is MRSA?

MRSA (methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*) is a potentially dangerous type of staph bacteria. Staph is commonly carried on the skin or in the nose of healthy people and can sometimes cause infection. MRSA is resistant to treatment by certain antibiotics. Although the infection may start as a minor skin sore, it can become serious, sometimes even fatal.



MRSA infection  
Public Health Image Library  
<http://phil.cdc.gov/phil/home.asp>

## What are the signs and symptoms?

Staph skin infections, including MRSA, usually start as a bump on the skin that may be red, warm, swollen, full of pus, or painful. They may look like a pimple, a boil, or a spider bite. Photos of MRSA skin infections are available at [www.cdc.gov/mrsa/symptoms/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/mrsa/symptoms/index.html).

## How does MRSA spread?

MRSA usually spreads by touching infected skin. It can also spread by touching materials or surfaces that had contact with an infection (e.g., towels, clothing, faucets, door knobs).



Washing your hands stops MRSA

## In what work settings is exposure to MRSA most likely?

MRSA skin infections can occur in any work setting. However, certain factors make it easier for MRSA to spread. These are the 5 Cs: **C**rowding, frequent skin-to-skin **C**ontact, **C**ompromised skin (cut, scrape, or rash), **C**ontaminated items and surfaces, and lack of **C**leanliness.

Workplaces where the 5 Cs are common include schools and daycare facilities, dormitories, military barracks, and correctional facilities.

People who work with farm animals or pets may also be at risk of MRSA infections from animals.

## Is it safe to work with someone who has a staph or MRSA infection?

It is safe to work with them as long as their wound is kept clean, dry, and covered.

## Who should be restricted from work?

- Restrict workers with wound drainage (pus) that cannot be covered and contained with a clean, dry bandage or who cannot maintain good hygiene practices, until the infection has healed.
- Restrict workers with active infections from activities where it is likely that others will contact the affected skin, until the infection has healed.
- Restrict food handlers with a lesion containing pus (such as a boil) or infected wound that is open and draining unless it is covered in accordance with the Food Code 2009 ([www.fda.gov/FoodCode2009](http://www.fda.gov/FoodCode2009)).

## If I have MRSA, can I go to work?

Unless a healthcare provider says not to, most people with MRSA infections can go to work.

## What can employers and supervisors do to prevent the spread of staph or MRSA in the workplace?

- Show employees you care about worker safety and health protection in the workplace by promoting a culture of safety.
- Ensure the availability of washrooms and handwashing supplies.
- Encourage workers to practice good hand hygiene.
- Ensure the performance of routine workplace housekeeping.
- Ensure that surfaces contaminated with MRSA drainage or blood are cleaned and disinfected.
- Ensure the availability of personal protective equipment and first aid supplies.

## How should surfaces be cleaned?

See [www.cdc.gov/mrsa/environment](http://www.cdc.gov/mrsa/environment) for information on environmental cleaning and disinfecting for MRSA.

Cleaners and disinfectants can be irritating and associated with health issues such as asthma or skin problems, so it is important to follow label instructions and use them safely.

## How should potentially contaminated laundry be handled?

- MRSA can spread on contaminated items such as clothing, uniforms, sheets, and towels.
- Wear gloves when handling potentially contaminated laundry, and wash your hands after removing the gloves.

- Launder items in a washing machine with laundry detergent. Use the warmest water recommended on detergent and clothing labels. Hot water helps kill MRSA.
- Do not pack items tightly in the washing machine. They may not get clean, and MRSA may not be removed.
- Machine dry completely. A dryer helps kill MRSA. Air drying may not kill the bacteria.

## What if I suspect an MRSA skin infection?

First cover the area with a bandage and contact your healthcare provider. This is especially important if you have a fever as well as signs and symptoms of an MRSA skin infection.

Do not touch the sore or the pus. Do not try to drain the pus yourself. This can make your infection worse or spread it to others.

## How are MRSA skin infections treated?

Your healthcare provider may drain the infection and prescribe an antibiotic. If you are given an antibiotic, take all the doses, even if the infection is getting better. Taking less than the full dose can make the remaining bacteria more resistant to antibiotics.

## How can I prevent staph or MRSA skin infections?

- Wash your hands frequently.
- Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer when washing is not possible.
- Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered.
- Avoid sharing personal items such as uniforms, towels, or razors.
- Wear gloves or other personal protective equipment as appropriate.

For more information on MRSA, see:

<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/mrsa/>  
<http://www.cdc.gov/mrsa/>

For information on handwashing, see:

<http://www.cdc.gov/handwashing/>

To receive documents or other information about occupational safety and health topics, contact NIOSH:

Telephone: 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636)

TTY: 1-888-232-6348

E-mail: [cdcinfo@cdc.gov](mailto:cdcinfo@cdc.gov)

or visit the NIOSH website at <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh>

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