

## Not Just an Ordinary Infection

Many of us have had an infection at one time resulting with little or no consequence. One specific infection that deserves special attention is MRSA. MRSA stands for Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus infection. This is an infection that can kill because of its resistance to certain antibiotics. According to The Mayo Clinic it has probably gone unnoticed because about one third of the population has it on their skin normally. It only becomes a problem when it gets inside the body through a cut or abrasion. People with weakened immune systems and older people are most at risk. The bacteria can travel on a person's clothing, bedrails, and catheters and as a result can affect the joints, bones or get into the bloodstream. The bacteria have been even detected breeding in floral arrangements. Decades ago it was showing up in hospitals and was resistant to broad spectrum antibiotics commonly used to treat it. Today, along with appearing in hospitals, it has been showing up in the general population.

From MRSA, a community-associated MRSA (CA-MRSA) has started showing up since the early 1990's. It is responsible for soft tissue infections along with serious body infections. Vancomycin is one of the few antibiotics that still is effective against this MRSA strain, although it is not effective in every case. CA-MRSA can be found in the nostrils of people who have pick up the strain in hospitals. It should be noted that 2 million people are carriers. A carrier is defined as one who can carry the bacteria, will not show the symptoms but can spread the infection. It can be spread by skin to skin contact through small cuts or abrasions. The infection can progress to the development of boils, abscesses or carbuncles. In rare cases it can cause massive lung, bone or blood infections. The conditions that can contribute to this infection include poor hygiene, over crowding or the sharing of personal items.

Some other reasons CA-MRSA is on the rise may be due to the over use of antibiotics to treat colds and flu with possible infections. Or the other extreme is when an antibiotic is prescribed and the entire prescription is not taken as directed. As a result germ mutation develops and becomes resistant to the antibiotic being used. Antibiotic resistance is also

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seen in the environment. In the United States, according to The Mayo Clinic, seventy percent of the antibiotics end up in beef, pigs and chickens because they are used to fatten the animals for market and also used to prevent disease in unhygienic conditions. The runoff from the feedlots eventually contaminates the water systems. This practice was banned in Europe and other industrialized countries because it was affecting humans.

Signs and symptoms of a MRSA infection might be a staphylococcus infection that starts as a small bump and progresses to deep painful abscess. The boil will be large and red, containing a lot of pus and has difficulty in healing. It should be noted that boils usually heal within two weeks. Also CA-MRSA might be found in a deadly form of pneumonia. It can produce a deadly toxin that destroys the living tissue, and possibly travel through the blood stream to other parts of the body resulting in death if not properly treated.

You might ask where could I have gotten this infection? Risks possibly include current hospitalizations, one living in a long term facility, or if you have had to use devices like dialysis, feeding tubes or the use of catheters. This condition can also affect young people who have cuts or abrasions, or youth engaged in sport activities that share equipment, towels or other personal items. People with weakened immune systems, or living in unsanitary conditions or possibly those who have had recent antibiotic use could also be affected. The infection is diagnosed by checking the nasal secretions or tissue samples for signs of the drug resistant bacteria, MRSA. If the infection has been treated with no effect, and it is discovered to be MRSA, then the last resort of antibiotics to be used is Vancomycin.

The best thing we can do to combat this infection is prevention techniques. Be vigilant in hand washing and disinfect surfaces frequently. If you have open sores, keep them clean and covered till they heal. If you participate in sports do not share towels and keep your personal items personal. As always if you have any questions or comments, eMail me at [gheffelmire@dearborncounty.in.gov](mailto:gheffelmire@dearborncounty.in.gov)