

## Is there anything more I can do to prevent MRSA when I'm out in the community?

- Again, washing your hands is key.
- Carry alcohol-based hand sanitizer with you so you can clean your hands if water is not available.
- Keep all sores covered with clean, dry bandages. If possible, keep the bandages covered by clothing.
- At the gym, wipe down equipment before using it and never share towels, uniforms or sports equipment that directly touches your body.
- If you have a draining wound, do not use swimming pools or exercise equipment until it is healed.

## What's being done in Arizona to combat MRSA?

During the 2008 legislative session, Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano signed SB 1356 into law. The legislation established an Infection Prevention and Control Advisory Committee to advise ADHS on community-associated and healthcare-associated infections. AzHHA developed the legislation in collaboration with APIC and the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS). The bill was designed to address grow-

ing concerns among lawmakers and the public regarding infections in healthcare institutions and the community. The committee is charged with providing recommendations to ADHS regarding the reduction, prevention and control of infections in order to improve patient safety and health outcomes in Arizona. SB 1356 requires the committee to take a holistic approach to the issue of infections by examining both healthcare-associated and community-associated infections. The bill was supported by several healthcare organizations representing physicians, nurses, physician assistants, long-term care facilities, community health centers and other healthcare organizations.

In addition, every Arizona hospital has an active infection control program with doctors and nurses who specialize in preventing infections. Arizona hospitals are also engaged in voluntary and mandatory infection tracking protocols to track MRSA infections to the source and prevent them from spreading further.

The Arizona Hospital and Healthcare Association (AzHHA)—with the support of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Arizona—has launched *Preventing MRSA: It's In Our Hands*. This initiative, which is endorsed by the Association for Professionals in Infection Control & Epidemiology, strives to educate consumers as well as patients and their families about MRSA and how to prevent it. For more information, visit [www.azhha.org/patient\\_safety/mrsa.aspx](http://www.azhha.org/patient_safety/mrsa.aspx).

This pamphlet has been created for the following:

- outpatient clinics;
- physician offices;
- emergency departments;
- urgent care centers;
- schools; and
- the general public.



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For more information, visit the Centers for  
Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)  
[www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar\\_mrsa\\_ca.html](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_mrsa_ca.html)



[www.azhha.org/  
patient\\_safety](http://www.azhha.org/patient_safety)



[www.apic.org](http://www.apic.org)

PREVENTING MRSA

*It's In Our Hands*

THE CONSUMER'S GUIDE  
TO UNDERSTANDING  
& PREVENTING MRSA

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A public service of the  
Arizona Hospital and Healthcare Association.

## THE FACTS ABOUT MRSA

### What is Staphylococcus aureus (staph)?

Staphylococcus aureus, commonly referred to as “staph,” refers to bacteria (germs) that are frequently carried on people’s skin or in their noses.

### What is MRSA (Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus)?

MRSA refers to the type of staph which is resistant to commonly prescribed antibiotics such as methicillin, oxacillin, penicillin and amoxicillin.

### Who gets MRSA?

Anyone can get MRSA. Within the past several years, there has been an increase in what is referred to as community-associated MRSA, which has emerged at day care centers, gyms, schools and elsewhere in the community as one of the most common causes of skin infections. It has also historically been found among people with weakened immune systems who may be in the hospital or healthcare facility. This is referred to as healthcare-associated MRSA.

### How is MRSA spread?

MRSA is spread primarily through hand-to-hand contact or touching items a person infected with MRSA has touched. This is why hand washing is the number one way to prevent the spread of MRSA.

### What does a MRSA infection look like?

MRSA can cause skin infections that look like a pimple, boil or even a spider bite. MRSA may cause serious infections such as pneumonia, bloodstream infections or surgical wound infections.

## MRSA RISKS & MRSA TREATMENT

### What does it mean to be colonized with MRSA?

People colonized with MRSA carry the germs but don’t have symptoms of an infection. Those people usually do not need antibiotic treatment. However, they should be aware of how to protect themselves and others from becoming sick. (See *Preventing MRSA at Home and in the Community* section)

### Can a MRSA infection be treated?

Yes, but since it is resistant to many common antibiotics, it can be hard to treat. Your healthcare provider may culture your infection site and have the lab test the bacteria to find out which antibiotic is best for you.

If you are diagnosed with an active MRSA infection, your doctor may choose one or more of the following options:

- drain the infection;
- prescribe antibiotics; and/or
- reduce the amount of bacteria on your skin.

### Is there anything that increases the risk of developing a MRSA infection?

Factors that may cause the MRSA infection are frequent use of antibiotics, not taking antibiotics as directed or taking antibiotics for a viral, as opposed to bacterial, illness.

### What does it mean to practice “antibiotic stewardship?”

It’s important to use antibiotics properly, when prescribed.

- If your physician prescribes an antibiotic, take all of the doses, even if the infection is getting better. This will help ensure that the most resistant strains of bacteria are eliminated.
- Do not save antibiotics to use later. The antibiotics you are taking now may not be the right one for a different infection.
- Make sure to obtain antibiotics from the proper source. Don’t share antibiotics or get them from other countries.

## WHAT STEPS CAN I TAKE TO PREVENT MRSA?

As always, the number one form of prevention is simple – washing your hands! Remember to wash them often either with soap and warm water or with an alcohol-based waterless hand sanitizer.

### There are other precautions you may take to help prevent MRSA.

- Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healed, changing bandages often, especially when moisture gets under them.
- Do not use swimming pools or exercise equipment until wounds heal.
- Avoid sharing personal items such as towels, washcloths, bar soap or razors.
- Frequently clean and disinfect objects (such as gym and sports equipment) and commonly touched surfaces (keyboards, light switches and door knobs).
- Wash sheets and towels often. When collecting laundry, hold it away from your clothing in order to prevent the spread of germs.
- Wash clothes, linens and towels in hot water and laundry detergent. Using a hot drier, rather than air-drying, also helps kill bacteria.