Staphylococcal Infections

Bacteria are tiny organisms that live almost everywhere in our environment. There are many hundreds of kinds of bacteria, and some of these can cause infections and lead to illness in humans. *Staphylococcus* is a name of a group of bacteria that are commonly found on and around humans.

Infections caused by staphylococcal bacteria can lead to a variety of illnesses, including:

- Pneumonia: infection of the lungs
- Osteomyelitis: infection of the bone
- Arthritis: infection of joints
- Skin infections, such as impetigo (superficial skin infection) and abscesses (deep skin infection)

One type of staphylococcal bacteria is called MRSA; this stands for methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*. This name means that this bacterium is not killed by many of the usual antibiotics that are used to treat infections caused by staphylococcal bacteria. This "resistance" to antibiotics has made treating these bacteria more difficult.

You can become a carrier of MRSA through touching an infected person or by sharing personal items. Methicillin-resistant *S aureus* can live on the skin of people for long periods of time before causing an infection; having bacteria living on you without an active infection is called being "colonized." Once a child is colonized with MRSA, it can be very difficult to get rid of, and it can be passed to other family members or other children. A study in this month's *Archives* found that children who were colonized with MRSA were very likely to have someone else in their family also colonized with MRSA.

WAYS TO PREVENT MRSA INFECTIONS

- Work with your child to wash hands frequently or use alcohol-based hand sanitizers.
- If your child gets a cut or scrape, use a clean, dry bandage to cover it. These bandages should be changed daily or more frequently if they look dirty.
- Do not let your child share towels, washcloths, or other personal items (including clothing) with anyone else. Doing laundry regularly will help ensure that your family's clothing and linens are safe to use.
- Frequently clean surfaces that your child touches.

If you suspect that you or your child might have a skin infection, seek treatment early in order to help prevent its spreading to other family members.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
http://www.cdc.gov/mrsa/

INFORM YOURSELF

To find this and other Advice for Patients articles, go to the Advice for Patients link on the *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine* website at http://www.archpediatrics.com.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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