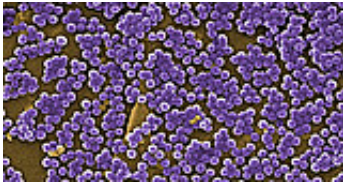


With MRSA more common outside of hospital, prevention is key

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Courtesy of the Center for Disease Control's Public Health Image Library

It used to be known as the bacteria you contracted after being admitted to the hospital.

But now, experts are saying methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* ([MRSA](#)) may be more prevalent in your stores, gym and even your home than in the halls and walls of your local infirmary.

World MRSA Day 2010 is Oct. 1, and Francine Kidd, infection control practitioner at UC Health University Hospital, says people should be cautious of this bacterial skin infection that is highly resistant to some antibiotics.

"MRSA is a condition that was thought to be predominately acquired among hospital populations, where patients with invasive devices and weakened immune systems were at greater risk of infection than the general public," she says. "However, the situation has flipped, and now

we're seeing more people coming into the hospital with MRSA than leaving with it."

Kidd says compromised skin surfaces, contact with those infected and inadequate personal hygiene are just a few ways someone can develop MRSA.

"MRSA is a skin organism," she explains. "It can't hurt you unless you get a break in your skin. Then, it can get in and start an infection. It is seen a lot in contact sports—like football—because people slam into each other and can easily break their skin, which is all MRSA needs to set up an [infection](#). Hospital infections are seen more in the [bloodstream](#), sputum (mucus) and other deep organs. Outside of the [hospital](#), MRSA is seen mostly as a skin abscess."

She says prevention is much better—and easier—than a cure.

"Cleanliness and extra precaution should be in the forefront of everyone's minds—whether you're going to the grocery or running on the treadmill at your local gym," she says.

Kidd says the first line of defense is the easiest.

"Wash your hands," she says. "MRSA is usually transmitted by everyday touching. Use soapy water and friction for at least 20 seconds. Use of a [hand sanitizer](#) is protective, especially when you're not near a sink. In fact, alcohol hand sanitizers can be better than washing because they kill germs. When you wash, you loosen the germs from your [skin](#) and rinse them down the drain."

In addition, Kidd says cover open scrapes or blisters, and if you are involved with contact sports, make sure to shower and wash after participating.

"Disinfect gym equipment before and after use, and bring your own towels and flip flops," she says. "Don't share."

"MRSA is not a new condition, and we've been hearing a lot about its effects recently," she continues. "Just because we don't hear about it every day doesn't mean it isn't out there. Do your best to protect yourself by being mindful of your health habits and the habits of others."

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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