

Bed bugs with MRSA superbug superbad news: expert

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As if the recent resurgence of bed bugs wasn't bad enough, Canadian researchers have found some of the [little blood-sucking critters carrying methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus](#), the potentially deadly superbug known as MRSA.

Added to that, the researchers also found [bed bugs](#) with vancomycin-resistant Enterococcus faecium, or VRE, another potentially deadly antibiotic-resistant bacteria.

But to make matters worse locally, a recent survey by a national pest-control company has found that Chicago is the fifth-most bed-bug-infested city in the United States.

“It’s an intriguing finding, especially since we’re having an epidemic of bed bugs and an epidemic of multidrug-resistant organisms such as MRSA and VRE,” said Dr. Jorge Parada, director of the Infection Prevention Program at Loyola University Health System (LUHS). “But what remains to be proven is that bed bugs actually are implicated in the transmission of MRSA or VRE.”

Most MRSA infections occur in hospitals and in other health-care settings, but the number of community-associated cases has risen dramatically in the United States over the last decade. Currently, between 5 to 10 percent of people are infected, and it is not known when that number will plateau. Some of the infections can be life-threatening.

The researchers discovered MRSA on bed bugs taken from three hospitalized patients who were residents of a lower-income area where bed bugs and MRSA are each on the rise. The researchers were exploring whether a connection existed between the two.

“These things overlap. MRSA and bed bugs both tend to be where there is more crowding and more people in lower socioeconomic groups,” Parada said. “That’s also true for prison and homeless shelters. It raises a real concern that this might be an additional factor in the spread of MRSA in those areas. More studies are needed.”

Though the MRSA strain the researchers found was of the community-associated variety, they were unable to determine if the bacteria were only living on the bugs or were growing inside of them.

“Another important concern is the additional health risk from bed bugs to people who are colonized by MRSA,” Parada said. “There are many people who are colonized, meaning they carry MRSA on their body but aren’t infected. However, with a bed-bug bite and the itching it provokes it’s possible that scratching could cause a break in the skin and provide an entry point for MRSA to enter and cause an infection.”

Enterococcus is a common bacterium found in the intestines of all people. Luckily, the resistant strain, VRE, is usually not aggressive and rarely causes illness in healthy people. Like MRSA, people who carry the organism with no signs of illness are considered colonized. Although in special circumstances VRE can be a devastating and difficult-to-treat illness, it is not any more likely to cause illness than the normal strain of the bacteria and most cases can be treated with other antibiotics.

Avoiding unnecessary antibiotic use and practicing good personal hygiene is the key to avoiding contracting [MRSA](#), VRE and many other infectious diseases, Parada said. That includes keeping cuts and

abrasions covered with a clean bandage and not sharing personal items such as towels, clothing, swimwear, combs, soap, shampoo or shaving gear with anyone else.

“Washing your hands a number of times a day is the best defense we have against many infections,” Parada said. “That simple act trumps most everything else that you can do.”

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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