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# MRSA Q&A

## MCCLATCHY NEWSPAPERS

Here are some answers to frequently asked questions about MRSA.

**Q. How common is MRSA?**

**A.** Very common. But not everyone gets sick from it. About 20 percent to 30 percent of us contract the germ, much the way we contract viruses for herpes and other germs, but many people never develop a full-blown medical problem.

**Q. So if it's that common, why is it in the news so much?**

**A.** The death of a Virginia high school student Oct. 15 triggered the recent concerns.

Public health authorities say there is no epidemic, nor even an unusual cluster of cases. But they welcome a chance to teach the public about prevention, which can carry over to protection against many infections. The sharing of drinks, towels and other objects, and the infrequent washing of hands increases the chances of picking up germs and passing them on.

**Q. What are the warning signs of a MRSA infection?**

**A.** It starts with a skin mark, much like a spider bite or pimple that can become swollen and red. That can happen quickly or over days. MRSA also can cause pneumonia, meningitis, skin abscesses and blood stream infections.

**Q. What should a person do if they have those signs?**

**A.** Seek medical attention immediately.

**Q. How can MRSA's transmission be prevented?**

**A.** Thorough hand washing is the best advice. Show-

not line dry.

Clean door knobs, telephones and shared sports equipment with disinfectants or diluted bleach.

**Q. Are there tests to detect MRSA?**

**A.** Yes, but a blood test or skin swab is suggested only for those showing symptoms.

**Q. Who is most likely to get sick from it?**

**A.** People who are hospitalized or in nursing homes, who are frail or have indwelling catheters for chemotherapy, who are undergoing dialysis or who are IV drug users. Others at risk have skin cuts or live in crowded conditions, such as prisons and dorms.

**Q. How is it treated?**

**A.** Sometimes just opening and draining the wound helps, along with keeping it covered to prevent spreading it. A person with MRSA doesn't necessarily have to be isolated. Treatment may not initially require antibiotics. Most infections respond, even if the first antibiotic used doesn't work.

**Q. Can it be serious?**

**A.** Yes. It caused death in about 5 percent of 368,600 patients treated for it at U.S. hospitals in 2005. Most were elderly or had low incomes.

## HOW TO AVOID GIVING, GETTING GERMS

■ Shower immediately after playing a sport.

■ Wash cuts and cover them with a clean bandage.

■ Hang and air-dry equipment. Spray it with a disinfectant to deter germs or have items professionally dry-cleaned after 10 uses.

■ Wash and clean sports items that smell. Wash uniforms in hot water and dry them on high heat.

er immediately after contact sports. Don't share towels, soap, wash cloths or razors, even among family members.

Wash towels in the hottest water available and dry them at the highest temperature. Do