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NJ health officials say 'superbug' cases are no cause for panic

by **Angela Stewart and Mark Mueller**

Wednesday October 31, 2007, 8:27 PM



Amanda Brown/The Star-Ledger

Members of the Newark schools' custodial department wipe down the walls and floors of Roberto Clemente Elementary School after a MRSA infection was reported there.

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With reports arriving nearly every day about more diagnoses of MRSA, the antibiotic-resistant staph infection identified two weeks ago as a "serious public health problem," New Jersey health officials said the isolated cases popping up are not a cause for panic.

"The message is there's not a public health emergency," said state epidemiologist Eddy Bresnitz, who is also deputy commissioner in the Department of Health and Senior Services. "In fact, there's a lot people can do to protect themselves, like practicing good public hygiene."

Physicians familiar with MRSA and researchers who study it are inclined to agree, though they say the stubborn infections have increased dramatically outside hospitals in the past five or six years.

"Not a day goes by that I don't have patients with MRSA infections," said Robert W. Tolan, chief of infectious diseases at the Children's Hospital in St. Peter's University Hospital in New Brunswick. "It's an increasing problem. The germ is everywhere. And the measures to control it are not good at all."

[MRSA fact sheet](#)

MRSA, or methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus, has been known to science for decades, but for most of that time, its prevalence had not been tracked.

On Oct. 16, the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released the first major study on the issue, finding that in 2005 alone, MRSA caused more than 94,000 life-threatening infections and killed more than 19,000 people across the country. About 85 percent of the cases were associated with hospitals and other health-care settings. The rest were in the community at large.

Read the full story in Thursday's Star-Ledger.

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