

Brief Update for Health Care Providers: Community-associated Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA)

Since the 1990s, community-associated Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) has appeared increasingly as a cause of skin and soft tissue infections. About 25-30% of the population is colonized with *S. aureus* in their nose, and approximately 1-2% is colonized with MRSA. While staphylococcal infections (both non-MRSA and MRSA) often involve the skin and soft tissues, they can also occur as surgical wound infections, urinary tract infections, bloodstream infections, pneumonia, and other serious infections.

Community-associated MRSA infections have been reported in a variety of populations (i.e., children, military recruits, athletic team members, incarcerated persons, injection drug users, men who have sex with men (MSM) and HIV-infected persons). Recently, an article¹ published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* described a multi-drug resistant strain of community-associated MRSA in MSM. While the study identified this strain in MSM, it has been seen in other persons who are not MSM. Conclusions that these strains are prevalent among all MSM cannot be made since the MSM in this study are not representative of all MSM.

Transmission of MRSA usually occurs via skin-to-skin contact and can happen during a variety of activities, including sex. Currently, there is no evidence to support that MRSA is a sexually-transmitted disease in the classical sense of transmission by mucosal (genital, anal, oral) contact.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends simple prevention measures for community-associated MRSA. Advise your patients to:

- Cover all open wounds
- Clean hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer, especially after changing bandages or touching infected wounds
- Refrain from sharing personal items (e.g. towel, wash towels, razors, or uniforms) that have had contact with infected wounds or bandages
- Consult with a doctor for the appropriate therapy of MRSA or staph infections

More information for patients and healthcare personnel about community associated MRSA can be found at:

- Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, Acute Communicable Diseases and Control Program (<http://lapublichealth.org/acd/MRSA.htm>)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_mrsa_ca.html)

¹ Diep BA, et al. Emergence of multi-drug resistant, community associated, methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* clone USA300 in men who have sex with men. *Ann Intern Med.* 2008 February 19 (print edition).