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Easy measures stop the spread of MRSA and staph from Good Samaritan Hospital

Over the last few months, Good Samaritan Hospital's Infection Control office has been receiving calls from the public about methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, or MRSA. National news stories have brought this infection to the forefront, and local cases have raised concerns about how someone might acquire MRSA and special considerations for those who have it.

Staphylococcus aureus, often referred to simply as "staph," are bacteria commonly carried on the skin or in the nose of healthy people. Approximately 25 to 30 percent of the population has the bacteria in their nose, but no infection. In the U.S., staph bacteria are one of the most common causes of skin infections. Most of these skin infections are minor (such as pimples and boils) and can be treated without antibiotics. However, staph bacteria also can cause serious infections (such as wound infections, bloodstream infections, and pneumonia).

MRSA is a type of staph that is resistant to **certain types of antibiotics**. Approximately one percent of the population carries MRSA bacteria but no infection.

Some people think that the only way one might get staph or MRSA is from a hospital setting, but community-acquired staph and MRSA **are** becoming more and more common. It usually shows up as skin infections and occurs in otherwise healthy people.

Skin infections caused by staph bacteria, including MRSA, may look like a pimple or boil and can be red, swollen, painful, or have pus or other drainage. These infections can spread to others through close skin-to-skin contact, openings in the skin such as cuts or abrasions, contaminated items and surfaces, crowded living conditions and poor hygiene.

If you **or someone you** know has staph or MRSA, you can prevent the spread of the infection by following some simple, common-sense steps. Good hand hygiene – and good hygiene in general – is one way to prevent the spread of staph and MRSA:

1. Keep your hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
2. Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healed. Bandages, even those that may contain staph or MRSA bacteria, can be disposed of with regular trash.
3. Avoid contact with other people's wounds or bandages.
4. Avoid sharing personal items such as towels or razors. Wash sheets, towels, and clothes that become soiled with water and laundry detergent. Drying clothes in a hot dryer, rather than air-drying, also helps kill bacteria in clothes.

While MRSA may sound like a scary "super bug," you probably know someone who has had it or has it today. Follow the easy precautions outlined above to prevent the spread of staph and MRSA.

If you think that you may have a staph infection or MRSA, see your doctor. Most of these infections are treatable with antibiotics. Be sure **to** take all the doses of antibiotic you are prescribed, even if the infection is getting better, unless your doctor tells you to stop taking it. Many staph skin infections can be treated by a healthcare provider without antibiotics.

As always, keeping your hands clean is a key to preventing the spread of infections!

(Information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. As a public service, Good Samaritan Hospital has free handwashing materials, including washroom signs and activity books, available to the public.)