

What Is MRSA and How Is It Contagious?

Staphylococcus aureus, or *S. aureus*, is commonly known as "staph." This bacterium was discovered in the 1880s. During this era, *S. aureus* infection commonly caused painful skin and soft tissue conditions, such as boils, scalded-skin syndrome, and **impetigo**. It was also known to occasionally progress to very serious infections in the blood or lead to **pneumonia**.

In the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, *S. aureus* developed resistance to penicillin. Methicillin, a form of penicillin, was introduced to counter the increasing problem of penicillin-resistant *S. aureus*. Methicillin was one of most common types of antibiotics used to treat *S. aureus* infections. However, in 1961, British scientists identified the first strains of *S. aureus* bacteria that resisted methicillin. This was the so-called birth of MRSA.

Staph infections, including MRSA, most frequently affect people who have weakened immune systems, such as those who are hospitalized or who are in other types of healthcare facilities (including nursing homes and dialysis centers). However, in the mid- to late-1990s, MRSA infections started appearing in otherwise healthy people, who had not been recently hospitalized or had a medical procedure.

Many people wonder if MRSA is contagious. The answer is, yes, MRSA can be spread between individuals. This transmission normally occurs through direct skin-to-skin contact or contact with shared items or surfaces that have come into contact with someone else's infection (such as towels or used bandages).

MRSA skin infections can affect anyone. However, these infections tend to occur more often in certain settings, such as schools, dormitories, military barracks, households, correctional facilities, and **daycare** centers.

These settings have factors that make it easier for MRSA to be transmitted, including:

- Crowding
- Frequent skin-to-skin contact
- Compromised skin (i.e., cuts or abrasions)
- Contaminated items and surfaces
- Lack of cleanliness.

(You can learn more about how MRSA is spread by clicking on **MRSA Transmission**. You can also learn who is at risk for MRSA by reading **Who Is at Risk for Getting MRSA?**)

Ref: <http://bacteria.emedtv.com/mrsa/is-mrsa-contagious.html>