

GRANT COUNTY

County Courthouse
P.O. Box 37
Ephrata, WA 98823
(509) 754-6060



HEALTH DISTRICT

1038 W. Ivy Avenue
Moses Lake, WA 98837
(509) 766-7960

Media Release – MRSA

Contact – Peggy Grigg, 509-754-6060

The Grant County Health District and its healthcare partners have been responding to questions about antibiotic resistant MRSA staph bacteria.

The most common type of staph is *staph aureus*, found on the skin of 20-30% of adults. There, it normally does not cause disease. Disease can happen when skin is broken or damaged and the bacteria gets into the body and begins to multiply.

MRSA, **M**ethicillin-**R**esistant **S**taphylococcus **A**ureus, is a hardier but increasingly more common staph bug. It may live on as many as 2-4% of individuals not causing any problems unless one's skin breaks or the person becomes ill in another way (with a flu, cancer, etc.). It cannot be killed with many antibiotics, including penicillin. MRSA can be cured. It must be treated with the right antibiotic and may require a skin cut to let the pus out. MRSA can look like a spider bite, a boil, pimple, or infected cut with pain, redness, swelling, drainage, pus, or fever. It can be mild or less often serious. It usually infects the skin. More serious infections in the lungs, urine, or in the blood happen much less frequently. In the past, MRSA infections have been seen mostly in hospitals. In recent years, MRSA is seen outside of hospitals, in our communities.

A MRSA tracking project was done by the Public Health Response Region 7 (Chelan, Douglas, Grant, Kittitas, and Okanogan counties) in 2003-2006. 11 hospitals, 3 clinics, and 2 labs participated. 217 cases were found in 2003. This increased to 958 cases in 2006. The most common place for a MRSA infection was on the lower extremities, then the head, neck and torso. 79% of all MRSA cases were skin infections. 81% of all cases were *not* related to staying in the hospital. 19% of cases happened in healthcare facilities. 21% of hospital cases were in adults and 14% were in children. MRSA was more common in men than in women.

Columbia Basin Hospital and the clinic diagnosed 35 MRSA and 43 non-MRSA staph infections during 2007. Most cases were not hospital-related.

The “5 C’s” that increase the risk for MRSA infection are: Crowding, Contact with others, Compromised skin (cuts, abrasions, etc.), Contaminated items, and lack of Cleanliness. MRSA is most often spread to another person by contaminated hands (or other skin-to-skin contact) or by contact with contaminated objects (towels, bandages, etc.). Higher risk settings include schools, dormitories, corrections, childcare, and homes. However, MRSA can affect anyone.

How can you stop the spread of MRSA?

- The most important thing that you can do to prevent MRSA infection is to wash your hands frequently, with warm soapy water; use 60% alcohol-base hand gel when soap and water are not available.
- Shower immediately after participating in exercise or sports.
- Cover skin wounds such as abrasions or cuts with clean dry bandage until healed.
- Do NOT share personal items that come in contact with bare skin (towels, razors).
- Use a barrier such as a towel or clothing between your skin and shared equipment such as weight-training benches.
- Frequently clean and disinfect surfaces that are often touched or come into direct contact with skin.
- Contaminated laundry should be separated from other laundry; all laundry should be handled with care.
- Only take antibiotics that have been prescribed for you, and take them as directed.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, schools do not generally need to be closed for disinfection when MRSA skin infections occur. It is important to note that the spread of MRSA can be prevented by simple measures such as hand hygiene and covering infections. Covering any MRSA infections will greatly reduce the risk of surfaces becoming contaminated with MRSA.

In general, individuals with MRSA infections do not need to be excluded from participation in normal activities except when:

- Exclusion is directed by a physician;
- A draining wound with pus can not be covered with a clean, dry bandage;
- The infected individual can not maintain good personal hygiene.

If you feel that you or someone in your family has a staph infection, contact your healthcare provider.

For more information, contact the Grant County Health District at 766-7960, or see the following websites, www.doh.wa.gov/topics/antibiotics/MRSA.htm, www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_mrsa_ca.html, or www.tpchd.org/page.php?id=12.