

# Scranton School District

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Dear Parent,

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information related to Methicillin-Resistant Staph Aureus (MRSA). As you are aware, MRSA has received a great deal of publicity over the past few days. In order to dispel any misconceptions and to provide you with the most current advice from the Pennsylvania Department of Health, the following information is presented in a question answer format.

### **What is Staphylococcus Aureus?**

Staphylococcus Aureus, Often referred to simply as “staph”, is commonly carried on the skin or in the nose of healthy people. Approximately 25% to 30% of the population is colonized (when bacteria are present, but not causing infection) with staph bacteria on the skin or in the nose. Sometimes, staph can cause an infection. Staph is among the most common causes of skin infections in the United States. Most of these skin infections are minor (such as pimples and boils) and can be treated without antibiotics (also know as antimicrobials or antibacterials). However, in some instances staph can cause serious infections (such as surgical wounds infections, bloodstream infections, and pneumonia).

### **What is MRSA (Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus)?**

Some staph bacteria are resistant to antibiotics. MRSA is a type of staph that is resistant to the antibiotic methicillin and its close cousins oxacillin, penicillin and amoxicillin. While 25% to 30% of the population is colonized with staph, only about 1% normally carries MRSA.

### **Who gets staph or MRSA?**

Staph infections, including MRSA, occur most frequently among persons in hospitals and healthcare facilities (such as nursing homes and dialysis centers) who have weakened immune systems. These health-care associated staph infections include surgical wound infections, urinary tract infection, bloodstream infections, and pneumonia and are quite different from the MRSA infections that occur in the community setting.

### **What is community-associated MRSA (CA-MRSA)?**

Another form of MRSA can cause illness in persons outside of hospitals and healthcare facilities. This community form of MRSA occurs in persons who have not been recently (within the past year) hospitalized nor had a medical procedure (such as dialysis, surgery and catheters) and is know as CA-MRSA. This type of MRSA usually produces skin infections such as pimples and boils.

### **How is MRSA transmitted in the community?**

The main mode of transmission of all forms of staph, including MRSA, is by the hands and skin to skin contact, crowded conditions, and poor hygiene. The sharing of towels, personal hygiene items like razors, athletic equipment, clothes non-sterilized tattoo instruments, and illicit drug paraphernalia also promote spread or

transmission of staph aureus from one individual to another. Habits like body shaving are also thought to promote MRSA infection

#### **What are the clinical features of CA-MRSA?**

CA-MRSA most often presents itself as skin or soft tissue infection such as a boil or abscess. Pimples, rashes, pus-filled boils, especially when warm, painful, red, swollen, can indicate a staph skin infection. Impetigo is one example of a skin infection that can be caused by staph, including MRSA. Patients frequently recall a “spider bite” Staph infections also can cause more serious infections, such as blood stream infections or pneumonia, leading to symptoms of shortness of breath, fever and chills.

#### **How is MRSA infection diagnosed?**

In general, a culture should be obtained from the infection site and sent to a microbiology laboratory. If staph aureus is isolated, the organism should be tested to determine which antibiotics will be effective for treating the infection.

#### **How is CA-MRSA treated?**

Most MRSA infections are treated by simply administering good wound and skin care: incision and draining of boils by a health care provider, keeping the area clean and dry, washing hands after caring for the area, carefully disposing of any bandages, and allowing the body to heal.

In some instances, antibiotics are also used to treat MRSA. However, several studies have shown that MRSA skin infections generally heal just as quickly with proper care whether or not antibiotics have been used. If antibiotics are needed, it is important for the patient to use medication as directed unless the healthcare provider says to stop. If the infection has not improved within a few days after seeing a healthcare provider, the patient should contact the provider again.

#### **How can I prevent staph or MRSA skin infections?**

Practice good hygiene:

1. Keep your hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and water or by using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
2. Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healed.
3. Avoid contact with other people’s wounds or bandages.
4. Avoid sharing personal items such as towels or razors.

What information on MRSA is available for students and parents/guardians?

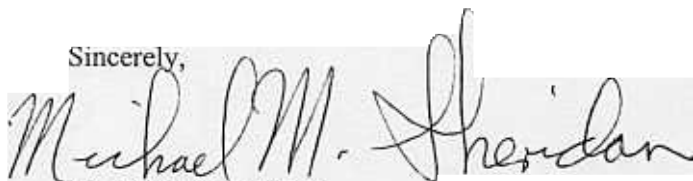
For more information about MRSA, visit:

Pennsylvania Department of Health at [www.health.state.pa.us](http://www.health.state.pa.us)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention CA-MRSA information for providers

[http://www.cdc.gov/ncidid/dhqp/ar\\_mrsa\\_ca.html](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidid/dhqp/ar_mrsa_ca.html)

Sincerely,



Mr. Michael Sheridan

C.E.O

Scranton School District