What is MRSA?
Staphylococcus aureus or “Staph,” are bacteria that live on the skin and in the nose of healthy people, usually without causing harm. Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) is a kind of staph bacteria that has become resistant to several types of antibiotics. Bacteria develop resistance when antibiotics are used frequently. Staph infections and MRSA are most often found in hospitals or other healthcare facilities, such as nursing homes, where people have weakened immune systems. However, they are becoming more common in the community among people who do not have medical problems.

What are the signs and symptoms of MRSA?
Staph bacteria, including MRSA, can cause skin infections that may look like a pimple, boil, fluid filled blister or skin sores that look like infected skin bites. The affected areas might be red, swollen, painful, warm to the touch, and/or be accompanied by fever.

How common are Staph and MRSA infections?
Staph bacteria are one of the most common causes of skin infections in the United States and are a common cause of pneumonia, surgical wound infections and blood stream infections. Studies indicate that one in three people carry staph in their nose, usually without any symptoms of illness.

How is MRSA treated?
Because MRSA is resistant to many antibiotics, it can be difficult to treat. However, some antibiotics can successfully cure MRSA infections. When antibiotics are prescribed, take all of the doses even if the infection is getting better. Never share antibiotics with other people. Many staph skin infections can be treated by draining the abscess or boil and may not require antibiotics. This procedure should only be done by a healthcare provider. If the infection does not get better and/or you begin to feel worse, contact your health care provider immediately.

How is MRSA spread?
Anyone can get MRSA through direct contact with an infected wound or by sharing personal items, such as towels or razors, that have touched infected skin. MRSA infection risk can be increased when a person is in places or engaged in certain activities that involve crowding, skin-to-skin contact, and sharing equipment or supplies. MRSA is almost always spread through physical contact, not through the air. The environment has not played a significant role in outbreaks of MRSA.

How can I protect myself from getting MRSA?
- Wash your hands with soap and water or use 60% alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Cover any cut or skin abrasion with a clean, dry bandage until healed.
- Shower after exercise.
- Avoid sharing personal items such as razors, towels, washcloths, clothing, uniforms, etc.
- Use a towel or clothing as a shield between your skin and shared equipment.
• Wipe surfaces or equipment with a disinfectant before and after use.
• Avoid contact with other people’s wounds or bandages.
• Consult with a health care provider if you think you might have an infection.

How is MRSA prevented from spreading in the home?
1. Regularly clean surfaces and commonly touched areas such as doorknobs, light switches, etc. with a disinfectant. Bleach solutions are easy to make and an inexpensive disinfectant: Mix one tablespoon of chlorine bleach to one quart of water (or ¼ cup chlorine bleach to one gallon of water). Make fresh daily and never mix bleach with any cleaners containing ammonia. Other disinfectants are available; always follow instructions when using them. Disinfectants should be applied liberally to the surface and allowed to remain at least ten minutes to kill bacteria.
2. Take extra care with laundry. All soiled linens and towels should be handled separately. Use hot water and bleach and a hot dryer. Wear disposable gloves when handling soiled laundry and wash hands frequently after taking off gloves. Store linens in a plastic bag if they cannot be washed right away.
3. Handle waste and garbage with care. Bandages and tissues can be discarded with normal garbage, but secure in a tied plastic bag.

Can pets carry MRSA?
It is possible for household pets (dogs and cats) to carry MRSA after being exposed to someone who has MRSA or even from another pet carrying the disease. While pets may carry MRSA on their fur, it is rare for them to develop active infection. Consult your veterinarian for treatment of pets so they no longer carry the bacteria or pass it back to you or a family member. Following good hygiene practices – frequent handwashing, bathing pets, and proper laundering of pet bedding – will help decrease the risk of MRSA exposure from pets.

How do I prevent giving MRSA to others?
1. Cover wounds at all times with clean dry bandages until healed. This will keep the infection from spreading to others.
2. Wash your hands and avoid touching your infected wound. Wash hands with liquid soap and water or use a 60% alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
3. Do not share personal items such as razors, sheets, washcloths, towels, uniforms or clothing. Use detergent in cleaning towels, clothes, etc, and set dryer on “hot” setting.
4. Tell any healthcare provider who treats you that you have a staph or MRSA skin infection.
5. Follow your healthcare provider’s instructions regarding taking medication and returning to work or school.
6. Cover your mouth with a tissue or your sleeve when coughing. Discard the tissue in a wastebasket.
7. Avoid contact with those who have weak immune systems such as newborn babies, elderly and those with chronic disease.
8. Do not exercise in a public gym or engage in contact sports until infection is cleared and a health provider approves participation.
9. Until sores can be adequately covered with a bandage, stay home. A health care provider should approve your return to work or school.
10. Carry 60% alcohol-based hand sanitizer to use when water and soap is not available.
11. Do not use a public sauna, hot tub or pool.
12. Avoid personal care services such as haircuts, manicures and massage until your wounds are healed.
13. Discuss your activities with a healthcare provider and employer if you work and/or volunteer in places where people have poor immune systems. Special precautions will most likely be needed.