

Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*

MRSA – JAMA Article

A recent study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association reported that invasive Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) caused more than 94,000 life-threatening infections and nearly 19,000 deaths in the United States in 2005.¹ Most of these infections were associated with health care settings, where MRSA occurs most frequently among patients with weakened immune systems or who are undergoing invasive medical procedures. Approximately fifteen percent of infections were reported to be community-associated (CA-MRSA). The study established a national baseline by which to assess future trends of invasive MRSA; it also prompted nationwide media attention. A CDC fact sheet relating to the study can be viewed at: http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhgp/ar_mrsa_invasive_FS.html

Reporting MRSA in Vermont:

In Vermont MRSA and CA-MRSA are not reportable, except in the case of outbreaks or suspected outbreaks. In the community setting, most MRSA infections are skin infections, presenting as pustules or boils which can be red, swollen, painful and purulent, occurring at the site of a cut or abrasion. Most of these skin infections are effectively treated with drainage and antibiotics; serious MRSA infections such as pneumonia or bloodstream infections are very rare in the community setting.

It has been uncommon for the Vermont Department of Health (VDH) to receive reports of community clusters of CA-MRSA. However, in recent years, two community clusters of CA-MRSA associated with unlicensed tattoo facilities have been reported. In both cases the VDH conducted an investigation, implemented control measures including working with other agencies to disallow further tattooing, and issued alerts to area health care providers. To report an outbreak, please call VDH-Epidemiology at (802)863-7240 or (800)640-4374. For more information on community-associated MRSA, please see: http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhgp/ar_mrsa_ca.html

MRSA in the School Setting:

In recent weeks the issue of MRSA in the school setting has surfaced in the national media. It is important to remember that MRSA can occur anywhere in the community setting, and will usually present as a skin infection. MRSA skin infections are usually transmitted by direct skin-to-skin contact or contact between an infected person and shared items such as towels or used bandages. Settings such as schools, dormitories, childcare centers, correctional facilities, military barracks and even households, where there may be crowding, frequent skin-to-skin contact, a lack of cleanliness, and the possibility for cuts and abrasions, make it easier for MRSA to be transmitted.

The most important steps to preventing MRSA skin infections in the community setting are covering wounds, washing hands frequently, and not sharing personal items such as towels, razors, uniforms and clothing. For more information on MRSA in the school setting, prevention, advice for teachers, educational materials, and MRSA toolkits for middle and high schools, please go to the CDC website at:

<http://www.cdc.gov/Features/MRSAinSchools/>

¹ JAMA. 2007;298:1763-1771

The Infectious Disease Bulletin can be viewed at:

<http://healthvermont.gov/pubs/IDB/index.aspx>

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Contents:

MRSA

Chart: Selected
Reportable
Diseases
October - 2007

