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Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) Infection and the Workplace

Description: Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) is a type of staphylococcus or “staph” bacteria that are resistant to many antibiotics. *Staphylococcus aureus* is an organism commonly found on the skin. While we are all colonized with “staph”, some people tend to develop skin infections, including boils and abscesses. If the strain happens to be MRSA, treatment with certain antibiotics may not work. Although this used to be seen primarily in hospitals, most MRSA infections are now acquired in the community.

Symptoms: Redness, swelling, warmth, tenderness of the affected area, or fever. Lesions may start out looking like a “bug bite” but then blisters and spreads to adjacent area and may form a “boil.”

Transmission: Exposed by close skin contact or sharing objects (towels, clothing) with a person with a MRSA infection or objects contaminated with MRSA. Exposure leads to colonization with the MRSA organism. Infection occurs when the MRSA organism is introduced into cuts, lesion or open skin or wounds.

Guidelines:

Preventing MRSA infection

- MRSA exists in our environment and on our skin.
- Remember, you can carry MRSA and not know it! You might infect yourself.
- Wash your hands with soap and warm water!
- Maintain good hygiene, shower regularly.
- Keep wounds clean and cover cuts and scrapes with a clean bandage or dressing until it is healed.
- Do not share personal use items, such as towels or clothes.
- Periodically disinfect counter tops, shelves, equipment, and tools.

Preventing transmission of MRSA

- Remember that hand sanitizer only works when used on visibly clean hands, so wash with soap and warm water as well as using hand sanitizer.
- Keep all wounds clean and cover with a clean bandage or dressing until it is healed. Dispose of used bandages carefully in a closed container.
- Seek care from a licensed health care professional as soon as possible if you suspect a MRSA infection. The earlier it is treated, the less likely it will spread.
- Typically, infected individuals have to be treated by having the wound opened and drained or receive specific antibiotics by mouth. Treatment may not always include antibiotics.
- Wash clothing and linen with hot water and laundry detergent. Dry in hot dryer.

Workplace responsibility:

- Persons testing positive for MRSA in a skin lesion should be able to return to work 24 hours after appropriate treatment is initiated and wound can be covered.
- Any skin infection not responding to treatment within 3 days should be referred back to the health care provider.