

What is MRSA?

MRSA is a Staphylococcus bacteria that has acquired the a gene which reduces the effectiveness of some antibiotics. While MRSA stands for **M**ethicillin **R**esistant **S**taphylococcus **a**ureus, MRSA strains are resistant to all penicillins and cephalosporins, and frequently also are resistant to a variety of other antibiotics. MRSA was first recognized in people over 40 years ago; it has become a significant disease causing agent over the last 10-15 years, and is now considered a potential serious infectious threat, because of the limited number of antibiotics that are effective against it.

MRSA infections in people are classified as HA-MRSA (Hospital Acquired), which affect people in the hospital with specific risk factors for infection, usually causing infections bloodstream, urinary or respiratory tracts, or CA-MRSA (Community Acquired), affecting people without specific risk factors, typically as skin infections.

Do all animals with MRSA get sick?

No. Only a small percentage of animals (or humans) that acquire MRSA actually develop illness. The rest can carry MRSA on various body surfaces for variable periods of time. These 'colonized' individuals are a concern because of the potential for future development of infection (especially if they undergo surgery) and because they can transmit MRSA to human contacts.

Can people get MRSA infection from their pets?

Humans can infect dogs or cats, and pets can infect their owners. It is, therefore, often difficult to determine which way the infection has been transmitted.

Should animals that are carrying MRSA be treated?

Treatment of animals that are colonized with MRSA is NOT recommended. There is currently no evidence that it is effective, and most (if not all) pets will clear MRSA colonization spontaneously if re-infection is prevented.

The key to minimizing colonization is stringent household infection control practices, in particular avoiding high risk contact and frequent hand hygiene. In rare situations where MRSA infections are rampant in people in the household and the entire household is undergoing eradication therapy, kenneling the pet for a couple weeks is a reasonable option, to allow it to clear the colonization and avoid re-infection.

How Do I prevent MRSA transmission?

Frequent washing of hands, including after touching pets, their bowls or their stool, keeping the house clean, washing the food and water bowls regularly, separating the known infected animals from the others until the clinical condition is resolved, avoid touching sites of infection or the nose and mouth of carrier animals.