

Meticillin-Sensitive *Staphylococcus aureus* (MSSA)

Staphylococcus aureus (often shortened to “Staph”, “Staph aureus” or *S. aureus*) is a type of bacteria (germ) which lives harmlessly on the skin and in the noses, in about one third of people.

Most strains of *S. aureus* are sensitive to the more commonly used antibiotics, and infections can be effectively treated. Some *S. aureus* bacteria are more resistant. Those resistant to the antibiotic meticillin are termed meticillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) and often require different types of antibiotic to treat them. Those that are sensitive to meticillin are termed meticillin-sensitive *Staphylococcus aureus* (MSSA).

MRSA and MSSA only differ in their degree of antibiotic resistance: other than that there is no real difference between them.

Symptoms of a staph infection

Having MSSA on your skin doesn't cause any symptoms and doesn't make you ill. You won't usually know if you have it unless you have a screening test before going into hospital.

If MSSA gets deeper into your skin, it can cause:

- redness
- swelling
- warmth
- pain
- pus

If it gets further into your body, it can cause more serious infections, like blood poisoning and toxic shock syndrome where it gets into the bloodstream. These are much less common than skin infections.

What is MSSA bacteraemia?

The word bacteraemia means the presence of bacteria in the bloodstream. A bloodstream infection can sometimes be referred to as septicaemia or blood poisoning. The cause of a bloodstream infection can be tested for by the microbiology lab using blood cultures.

When MSSA is found in the blood cultures, then a person is diagnosed with an MSSA bacteraemia. Bloodstream infections are serious and can be life-threatening.

How you get MSSA

The bacteria that cause MSSA infections live harmlessly on many people's skin, often in the nose and armpits and on the buttocks. This is known as "colonisation" or "carrying" MSSA. They usually only cause an infection if they get into the skin or deeper into your body – for example, through a bite, cuts, surgical wounds or drip catheter etc.

You can get MSSA on your skin by:

- touching someone who has it
- sharing things like towels, sheets and clothes with someone who has MRSA on their skin
- touching surfaces or objects that have MRSA on them

Getting MSSA on your skin won't make you ill, and it may go away in a few hours, days, weeks or months without you noticing. But it could cause an infection if it gets deeper into your body.

How to stop staph infections spreading

It can be difficult to prevent staph infections because many people have the bacteria on their skin.

But there are things you can do to reduce your chances of getting an infection or spreading the bacteria to others.

Do

- wash your hands with soap and water regularly
- keep your skin clean by having a bath or shower every day
- keep any cuts clean and covered
- use disposable tissues to blow your nose

Don't

- do not share towels, washcloths, bed linen, toothbrushes and razors