FACT SHEET

Community-Associated Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* Infections

- **What is CA-MRSA?**
  CA-MRSA is a bacterium that is like other *Staphylococcus aureus* bacteria with three differences:
  - it can’t be killed by the antibiotic, methicillin, but can be killed by several different antibiotics
  - it arose from people in the community not the hospital
  - it has special genes that make it more likely to produce pus

- **Is CA-MRSA new?**
  CA-MRSA was first described in 1998 as a cause skin and soft tissue infections in a few Chicago children, but in 2006 these bacteria and the infections they cause:
  - have been shown to be genetically distinct from all previous *Staphylococcus aureus* bacterium
  - have significantly increased the total number of skin and soft tissue infection cases in previously healthy child and adult community dwellers
  - have caused epidemics in sports teams members, day care center attendees, and military recruits

- **Who does it CA-MRSA afflict?**
  Healthy children and adults make up the overwhelming majority of patients with CA-MRSA infections, but children are more likely to be victims than adults. Among these healthy persons, individuals more likely to get CA-MRSA infection are:
  - poor
  - obese
  - ethnic minorities
  - contact sports that risk breaking the skin.

- **What symptoms does CA-MRSA cause?**
  The most common symptoms are:
  - pain, redness and swelling of skin areas smaller than a pencil eraser in diameter progression to larger areas that form a boil or abscess
  - later, larger sites drain yellow thick material (pus) either by themselves or with minor trauma, causing relief of pain
  - low grade fever and malaise are uncommon but can occur and mean medical intervention is needed
in 1-2%, these symptoms can be followed by rapid onset of high fever, severe pain, redness and swelling of an arm, leg, or foot so that bearing weight is impossible. These patients require immediate evaluation and hospitalization for antibiotics to be given by vein.

- **How is CA-MRSA spread?**
CA-MRSA is spread by direct contact with a person with a CA-MRSA infection (e.g., a draining boil) or an object used by that person (e.g., sports equipment, clothes, towels, razors, etc.).

- **How can my doctor make the diagnosis of CA-MRSA infection?**
The only way to make a diagnosis is to get a culture of the infected site. Since CA-MRSA is so common, all skin and soft tissue infections should be suspect and should be cultured. Since some boils, for example, drain pus by themselves, the culture material is readily available. For others, the doctor should drain the abscess not only to obtain pus but also to relieve pain and make the antibiotic work more effectively in curing the infection.

- **How is CA-MRSA treated?**
CA-MRSA treatment has 2 parts:
  - drainage of pus-filled sites like boils and abscesses
  - use of an appropriate antibiotic

- **Can CA-MRSA be prevented?**
The only way is through good hygiene and nutrition (avoid obesity) and avoidance of insect bites. Skin abrasions should be thoroughly cleansed, draining wounds should be completely covered and dressings changed frequently, and hands should be thoroughly washed after contact with a person with skin infection. Football players, wrestlers other participants in contact sports should not share equipment, towels or razors, and equipment should be cleansed after each use. Antibiotic ointments usually are not helpful and there are no vaccines. So remember:
  - use good hygiene
  - don’t share clothes, towels, sports equipment unless clean thoroughly
  - avoid insect bites
  - cleanse cuts and scrapes thoroughly

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