

October 24, 2007

Dear Resident:

In response to recent media coverage of methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) infections, the Somerville-Raritan-Manville Health Department is providing this important information to our residents. We understand that hearing about a “super bug” can be very frightening, particularly to parents. However it is important to keep in mind a few key facts about MRSA:

- MRSA is not a new disease. It has been a challenge to healthcare providers and the public health community since the 1960s. It was first primarily associated with hospitals. In the last several years, it has also become increasingly common in the community.
- MRSA is a type of bacterial infection that is resistant to **some, but not all** antibiotics. **It is treatable.**
- MRSA can cause skin infections. These infections result in redness, warmth, swelling, and tenderness. Often a MRSA infection will look like a spider bite, boil, abscess, or turf burn. If you or a family member has any of these symptoms, please contact your health care provider.
- If you are prescribed antibiotics, it is critical to take them as prescribed until finished, even if you start to feel better or your condition improves.
- MRSA infections are usually spread by skin-to-skin contact or by direct contact with the drainage from the wound. They may also be spread by contact with contaminated surfaces or things such as sports equipment or personal hygiene items.
- MRSA skin infections are NOT spread through the air.

I offer you the following recommendations on how to prevent MRSA infections:

- Educate yourself about MRSA and preventive behaviors.
- Encourage frequent hand washing. Any kind of soap is fine for hand washing. It does not need to be antibacterial.
- Encourage proper personal hygiene such as showering after sporting activities, wearing clean clothing, etc.
- Discourage the sharing of personal items such as clothing, towels, bar soap, sports equipment, etc.
- Ensure proper cleaning of surfaces with 1/4 cup of bleach mixed into one gallon of water, or use an EPA approved disinfectant known to kill bacteria. Most common over the counter disinfectants will be effective if they have an EPA

registration number on the label and state that they are effective in killing bacteria.

- Make sure all skin infections and wounds are bandaged properly.
- Consult your health care provider for evaluation of any suspicious skin lesion.

Schools should not be closed and classes should not be cancelled if a student or employee is infected with MRSA. People who are infected are permitted to attend school/work as long as they are compliant with infection control measures. Skin infections should be kept clean and bandaged. Students who participate in contact sports may be excluded from participating if they cannot keep their wound properly bandaged.

Please be aware of the signs and symptoms of MRSA. You can go to the Health Department's page on this website to download a MRSA fact sheet. The staff at the Somerville-Raritan-Manville Health Department are working with all the appropriate stakeholders to investigate every concern, minimize exposure and act as a resource for you.

Steven T. Krajewski, Health Officer