



Community-Associated Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (CA-MRSA)

Call to Action

The California Medical Association Foundation's AWARE (Alliance Working for Antibiotic Resistance Education) Project will convene key stakeholders in California to discuss this emerging epidemic of Community-Associated Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (CA-MRSA). The purpose of this symposium is to develop a statewide action plan to raise public awareness of this serious infection and to make CA-MRSA a reportable communicable disease in California. This action plan will also seek to strengthen and effectively coordinate effort to prevent, diagnose and treat CA-MRSA in California.

Community-Associated Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* is a type of Staph bacteria that usually manifested as skin infections, similar to a pimple or a boil. CA-MRSA is commonly mistaken for a "spider bite". CA-MRSA is contracted by individuals who have not been hospitalized or had a medical procedure within the past year. CA-MRSA is a communicable infection that is currently not a reportable disease in California. Some risk factors for CA-MRSA include: recent antibiotic use, recurrent skin diseases, and crowded living conditions. CA-MRSA is transmitted primarily through direct skin-to-skin contact, but can also be spread through contamination of environmental surfaces such as clothing and towels. If left untreated, CA-MRSA can infect the blood and bones, and can potentially be life-threatening.

CA-MRSA is resistant to many antibiotics; however it can be treated if diagnosed properly and early enough. If individuals clinically present with signs of CA-MRSA, culture is taken from the infected area and tested for resistance. Positive result may require the wound to be drained to treat the skin abscesses.

In recent years, there have been clusters of skin and soft tissue infections in certain groups, such as prison inmates, players of close-contact sports, and K- 12 schools. However, CA-MRSA is not limited to these populations. CA-MRSA outbreaks have also occurred in healthy people who come into contact with individuals unaware that they may have the infection. This poses a serious risk to the public as undetected and untreated CA-MRSA can continue to voraciously spread among the general population.

Due to the increasing numbers of CA-MRSA being reported, it is important to address it as a public health issue. Some infection control and treatment guidance exists, but much is unknown about the best method of treatment of CA-MRSA. Information on proven reproducible prevention strategies and methods are lacking and additional surveillance, epidemiological and clinical studies are necessary. Research has shown an increase in hard-to-treat SSTIs and outbreaks within families.¹ Additionally, with an increase in complications, more patients require anesthesia to drain CA-MRSA skin abscesses. Resources to raise public awareness of the seriousness of CA-MRSA are still needed.

CA-MRSA is part of a larger problem of antibiotic resistance. Unless more research is done, and public health officials and physicians collaborate to develop resources and effective medication, it is anticipated that CA-MRSA will be progressively harder to manage and control. Without a statewide strategic action plan to combat this potentially dangerous infection, more individuals will contract CA-MRSA at an alarming rate. The potential ramifications of CA-MRSA are unknown if it is left to proliferate in the public domain without being reported. Sound research and information needs to be developed to build public awareness about the seriousness of this infection, and what the public can do to guard themselves from contracting CA-MRSA. Building a collaborative on CA-MRSA will inform state policy leader and bring CA-MRSA into the forefront as an emerging epidemic and serious public health issue.

¹ South Carolina Antibiotic Resistance Strategic Plan Report to the Legislature. South Carolina Department of Health and Environment Control. January 12, 2007. Page 3