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HEALTH DEPARTMENT SUGGESTS MEASURES TO REDUCE THE SPREAD OF ‘MRSA’

Pennsylvania is a National Leader in Curbing Spread of Healthcare-Associated Infections

HARRISBURG – Following reports about methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus, or MRSA, outbreaks in schools and other community settings nationwide, Health Secretary Dr. Calvin B. Johnson today said there are measures that people can take to reduce the risk of contracting or spreading MRSA.

Staph bacteria are normally present on the skin and in the nose of many healthy people without causing any health problems. However, if staph enters the body through cuts or abrasions on the skin, it can cause an infection. MRSA is a form of staph that is resistant to certain antibiotic treatments like methicillin.

“This infection has been around for a number of years and experience has shown us that its spread can be prevented by simple measures like hand washing, practicing good hygiene, and immediately seeking medical attention when you have a skin infection,” said Dr. Johnson.

Dr. Johnson said the spread of community-associated MRSA can be minimized by taking these precautions:

- Keep your hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and warm water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer;
- Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until they are healed;
- Avoid contact with other people’s wounds or bandages;
- Avoid sharing personal items such as towels, razors, or clothing; and
- Routinely clean commonly used items like athletic equipment.

All forms of staph, including MRSA, are spread by skin-to-skin contact, inadequate personal hygiene and poor disinfection. MRSA infection occurs most often among people with weakened immune systems in hospitals, nursing homes and other health care facilities, and is known as healthcare-associated MRSA.

However, MRSA infections can also occur among healthy individuals who have not recently been in a health care setting. This community-associated MRSA is most commonly seen among sports teams, in schools, prisons, military facilities and other places where there is frequent skin-to-skin contact. The sharing of towels and personal hygiene items like razors, athletic equipment, clothing and drug paraphernalia also promotes the spread of staph bacteria.

On the skin, community-associated MRSA usually appears as a pimple, boil or abscess that is red, swollen, painful, and may have pus or other drainage. Patients may think early signs of infection look like a spider bite or ingrown hair. It is important for anyone who has these symptoms to see a doctor because, if untreated, MRSA can lead to more serious infections.

Governor Rendell's "Prescription for Pennsylvania" health care reform initiative established Pennsylvania as a national leader in the effort to track and prevent MRSA and other infections in health care settings.

The Governor recently signed Act 52, which requires hospitals and nursing homes to report health care associated infections, and for hospitals, nursing homes and ambulatory surgical facilities to implement comprehensive infection control plans to stop its spread. Details are available at www.rxforpa.com.

For more information about MRSA, visit www.health.state.pa.us or call 1-877-PA-HEALTH.

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