



FIRE DEPARTMENT • CITY OF NEW YORK
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2.1.1 UPDATE ON MRSA HEALTH ISSUE

Recent media reports about the spread of antibiotics-resistant staph bacteria known as MRSA have highlighted a growing health problem that has spread beyond medical facilities - such as hospitals and long-term care facilities - where traditionally this has been an issue.

In fact, we have had several cases of MRSA (methicillin resistant staph aureus) in firehouses over the past few years. In most cases, the skin infection was self-limited with a local skin infection and was treated with oral medications. All members were evaluated by an infectious disease physician before returning to work.

Our Bureau of Health Services has consulted with city, state and federal health care experts to assist the Department in assessing the problem and developing recommendations and guidelines for our workforce. (More than a year ago, BHS published information on MRSA in its Health Connections newsletter.)

Recently, BHS again reviewed its policies with the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH). This included a firehouse site visit to review common practices and identify ways to prevent MRSA transmission through education and changes in behavior, processes, equipment and supplies with the goal of improving hygiene and limiting direct and indirect transmission through contact with skin.

Among the recommendations are the following:

- Wash hands frequently with soap and water.
- Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healed.
- Avoid contact with other people's wounds or bandages.
- Do not share items and products that may spread MRSA, including cosmetic items, bar soap, razors, clothing, towels and unwashed linens.
- Ensure after each use surface cleaning of areas with a high degree of bare skin contact (e.g., exercise equipment).
- Use all protective equipment as designed, especially while administering medical care to patients.
- Consult your physician if you develop any of the following conditions: draining wounds, boils and abscesses.

To assist in facilitating good hygiene as called for in the recommendations of these health professionals, the Department is taking the following steps:

- Anti-bacterial hand gel dispensers will be installed in all firehouses and EMS stations.
- A case of gel packets will be delivered to each firehouse/EMS station; subsequent refills are to be ordered by company commanders from the Central Storehouse Catalog via the FDNY Intranet. The Department is making arrangements for the storehouse to stock the refills, and units will be notified via Department Order once the product is in stock (the ID#, etc.).
- Containers of anti-bacterial liquid soap will be distributed for use in kitchen/bathroom areas in all Department facilities. Refills will be available from the Central Storehouse.

These supplies have been ordered and will be distributed to field units in the next few days.

Further information on MRSA can be accessed by going to the FDNY Intranet site. Click on the BHS Community link to see both an FAQ section and updated BHS newsletter *Health Connections* devoted to this topic.

Also, for comprehensive information on this topic you can visit the state Department of Health website at www.health.state.ny.us and view the report, Prevention of Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA) Infections in the School Setting. While focusing on school-based issues, this report contains comprehensive medical information on MRSA that is of general interest.

By Order of: **Nicholas Scoppetta**, *Fire Commissioner*
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