



Angela Treadaway
Regional Extension Agent
News Release

Facts about Staph

Yes, it's scary.

The federal government recently reported some 19,000 deaths in the United States had occurred from drug-resistant staph infections, known by the tongue-twisting name of methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, or MRSA.

A short-lived panic followed, and products such as hand sanitizers and disposable blood pressure cuffs suddenly got more popular.

Cause for panic? No. But there is plenty of reason to take precautions, experts stress.

Granted, MRSA is quite deadly in some instances, these experts say. But the vast majority of deadly cases still occur in hospitals and nursing homes where factors such as open wounds and compromised immune systems provide this superbug with more ideal conditions. Outside of these care facilities, exposure usually is manifested as treatable skin infections.

Still, this is no reason for Alabamians and Americans in general not to take this superbug seriously.

MRSA is a widespread problem throughout the United States, and it's a problem Americans are likely to be dealing with for the foreseeable future.

That's the bad news.

The good news is that a growing number of hospitals and other care facilities are fully aware of this threat and are taking precautions.

In a growing number of hospitals throughout the nation, patient rooms now are routinely equipped with disinfectant solutions, which doctors, nurses and other staff members are required to use for hand sanitizing following patient visits.

Also, under federal guidelines that soon will go into effect, Medicare and Medicaid no longer will cover treatment costs for these types of infections — a measure designed to force hospitals to undertake more stringent measures to prevent these infectious outbreaks. Moreover, hospitals soon will be required to bear the costs of treating these types of infections.

The problem also is squarely on the radar of many of the nation's schools, especially following a student's death from MRSA at a Brooklyn school in mid-October. More recently a Valley woman became the first Alabama victim of MRSA.

In fact, many schools now routinely undertake thorough disinfections in cases where one or more students or staff members have developed infections.

Researchers concede they have no way of knowing whether the recent spike in MRSA-related deaths is evidence that the threat is growing.

Whatever the case, there are some basic hygienic rules all of us should follow to reduce our risk of exposure.

At the top of the list is practicing basic good hygiene, namely keeping one's hands clean by washing with soap and water and using alcohol-based hand sanitizers. Showering immediately after exercising also is considered an effective safeguard.

People also should take special care to treat skin cuts and abrasions with solutions such as hydrogen peroxide and to cover these wounds with bandages.

Also, avoid sharing personal items, such as towels and razors — any item that routinely comes in contact with bare skin. Be sure to use some type of barrier — for example, clothing or a towel — when you use shared equipment, such as a weight-training bench.

Finally, take care to clean frequently accessed surfaces, such as table and countertops.

For more information about preventing MRSA, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention “Questions and Answers about Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) in Schools” at <http://www.cdc.gov/Features/MRSAinSchools/>.

For more information on handwashing safety or food safety please contact Angela Treadaway your Regional Extension Agent with the St Clair County Extension Office at 205-410-3696 or contact the St Clair County Office at (205) 338-9416.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work in agriculture and home economics, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, and other related acts, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The Alabama Cooperative Extension System (Alabama A&M University and Auburn University) offers educational programs, materials, and equal opportunity employment to all people without regard to race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, veteran status, or disability. Visit our website at www.aces.edu/StClair.