

## **MRSA 2 022205**

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(HEA, POL: Second part of series on MRSA.)

***FOR AIR TUESDAY ME AND ATC  
NOTE WARNING IN LEAD FOR SENSITIVE PEOPLE***

Public health workers are worried about a new staph infection called MRSA, which is resistant to antibiotics doctors used to be able to count on. In its favor, MRSA doesn't seem to discriminate: it's infecting everyone, in jail and out, gay and straight, athlete and couch potato.

KPCC's John Rabe this week has a series of reports on MRSA. Here's Part Two, which, I will warn you, includes some graphic images.

**3002 MRSA 2 TUE SOQ 3:34**

## SCRIPT:

By one estimate, so far, tens of thousands of people in LA County have had MRSA, a staph infection resistant to many of the traditional treatments. John, a forty-year old gay man who lives in Hollywood, has had it four times in the last two years.

**John 22/1:21:** (Where has it showed up?) Laughs. Oh, well, in some not so flattering places. The first time was on my rear end. The second time was on the front side. The third time was on my wrist, right there. And most recently on my jaw.

Today he's got a boil the size of a golf ball on his jaw that makes him look like Tony Robbins. John says they always start like ingrown hairs, but far more painful. Then they get big and red and start to ooze.

**John 22/4:07:** This is the first I had that's been visible to the public. And what concerns me is that they tend to scar very badly. They tend to take many weeks to heal and they scar very badly.

MRSA is so new -- the first cases started being reported in the late 1990s -- that we don't know whether HIV-positive people like John are more at risk than anyone else. But there have been a number of cases in LA among men who have sex with men.

Brian Risley of AIDS Project Los Angeles says it makes sense to treat MRSA as a sexually transmitted disease.

**Brian Risley 41/3:21:** In terms of public health it's an STD. When it caused alarm was because we were seeing it in

people with HIV. We were seeing it within the crystal meth community, with men who were having sex with men. So therefore the connotation was there was sexual transmission.

He's right. MRSA can certainly be transmitted by intimate skin-to-skin contact. But, using the same logic, it's also a sports-related disease: The St Louis Rams got it, and so did some players on the USC football team, although the school refused to talk with us about it. Then again, students at a cosmetology school in Long Beach also got it. And so have hundreds of inmates in the LA County jail. The common denominators are unclean shared space -- like bathhouses, dorms, locker rooms, and prison cells -- and unhygienic practices, like dirty clothes and shared towels. But we don't know much beyond that.

Doctor Elizabeth Bancroft is one of the MRSA experts for LA County public health.

**Elizabeth Bancroft 28/:56:** There haven't been any studies that look in and say, you know, this many people who walk into a jail or walk into a place where there's MRSA, this percent of people will get the bug. We don't know how easily it's spread or how easily it's spread versus any other bug.

Athletes have trainers who'll spot infections, gays have advocacy groups that chart health issues, and inmates have the ACLU, which runs a special jails project. But Jill and Joe Sixpack? There's no clearinghouse for MRSA's progress in the general population. And Doctor Jonathan Fielding, head of LA Public Health, says it doesn't make sense to require doctors to report every case they see.

**Fielding 18/1:10:** I don't think it would help to be reportable. We'd be absolutely overwhelmed because the number of cases would be absolutely huge. Reportable diseases works when you have small number of cases and where you can do something specifically about each of those cases.

Fielding's urging every doctor to run a lab test on every skin infection, and to stay current on the latest MRSA news through the county's website, [lapublichealth.org](http://lapublichealth.org), which the public can use, too.

Fielding says MRSA is reason to be concerned, not to panic, and the standard advice applies: Wear flip-flops in the locker room and sit on a towel, wash your hands, change the sheets.

Tomorrow, MRSA in the LA County jail.

**Chris 33/:20:** Like big old bubbles and half your skin falling off . It's just nasty. I don't' even know why they have this place open it's so bad. It was pretty bad in there.

John Rabe, 89.3-KPCC.