

**MRSA 3 022305**

**3080**

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

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

There's a new world epidemic, a pernicious bug called MRSA.

It's a staph infection resistant to many common antibiotics. It can be picked up on many surfaces, and can go through unbroken skin. It can break out wherever people are crowded together in unclean conditions, and in LA County, it's become a political and health problem because of an ongoing outbreak in the jail.

KPCC's John Rabe has been reporting on MRSA this week. Here's the final installment of his series, which includes some unsettling descriptions.

**3080 MRSA 3 WED SOQ 4:21**

**OUT**

**For all the stories in John's series, go to our website,  
[kpcc.org](http://kpcc.org).**

## **SCRIPT:**

### **SFX: INMATES ANGRY CLAMORING. MD 2/TK 10**

Inside the Men's Central Jail in downtown LA: 6-thousand inmates, six to a cell, some sleeping on the floor, sharing toilets and towels, some of them having sex. Of the tens of thousands of cases of M-R-S-A in LA County, a good proportion of them are here.

The LA County jail reported 9-hundred MRSA cases in 2002, 18-hundred in 2003, and almost 25-hundred last year. Jody Kent, who watches the county jails for the ACLU, says the jail is an MRSA hotbed because it's crowded and dirty.

**Jody Kent 1/1:03:** When you go on a tour of Central Jail the deputies will forewarn you not to touch a single thing. They have these old decrepit escalators ... and they always warn you: Do not touch the railings, because the inmates run their hands along those railings to get up the stairs. :14

### **SFX CROSSFADE TO STREET AMBIENCE, TK 35**

Outside the jail, it only took three tries to find someone who said they had MRSA. Chris from Redondo Beach didn't have it, but in 17 days inside, he said he saw a dozen victims.

**Chris X 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.

35-year old Kenny Martinez from the Valley didn't have it. They're supposed to screen inmates for MRSA before jailing

them.

**Martinez 32/:30:** (Rabe: Did they tell you anything about MRSA, that staph infection?) No, no, but they didn't mention it at all. :07

Then Don Murphy from Philadelphia, just out of the jail, asked for a light. He had a big MRSA scar on his left hand.

**Murphy 33/3:21:** Started out like a little pimple, a little yellow pimple, and I went to squeeze it and it kept growing and growing and was very painful. The stuff inside would not come out. It was pretty nasty. I almost lost my finger.

Chief Chuck Jackson runs the jail. He says there were about 2-hundred cases like Murphy's every month. Lately, because of prevention efforts, he says it's been down to 1-hundred-80.

**Jackson 17/5:57:** We're paying a lot of attention to it and doing everything that we can, given the resources that we have and the funding that we have, and obviously, like at Central Jail, the type of facility we have to deal with.

ACLU volunteers go into the jail two or three times a week, checking to see if Jackson is living up to an agreement to provide basic MRSA prevention: screening inmates before they come in, giving them regular changes of linen and clothing, making sure they can shower regularly with soap, and so on. Kent says she told the jail chiefs recently that the policies were not being met consistently.

**Jody Kent 1/5:55:** Once we brought it to their attention that they weren't, they were very very concerned, and as a

result they have a new auditing system that they have put together in the last week or two, in order to make sure that people are held accountable if these schedules are not being met. So we are very pleased to see that happening. :19

But the LA County Board of Supervisors is somewhat less than pleased. The Supes have accused the sheriff and health department of passing the buck on MRSA in the jails for months now. The atmosphere got very heated after a *Daily News* article some people took as evidence that the jail essentially spreading MRSA to the general population. Here's Gloria Molina at last week's meeting, during a grilling of health and jail officials.

**Molina MTG 27/1:42:** If we can't contain it in a contained area ... Boy, I don't know what the hopes are when this spreads out all over and all of us are a part of this infection. :10

But it's already all over -- from the USC football team to Long Beach cosmetology students, to thousands of others -- and experts consulted for this story say there's nothing to the theory that the jail caused the current outbreak among the general public. Public Health Epidemiologist Dr. Elizabeth Bancroft corrected Molina.

**Bancroft 27/3:13:** (TO MOLINA) When you've got people in crowded living conditions, it's going to spread that much easier, and that's why there is not a single jurisdiction that has successfully controlled MRSA in their detention or correctional facilities.

After pressure from the ACLU, last week, jail officials agreed to set up more beds, so fewer inmates will have to sleep on the

floor. And Chief Jackson says he's very close to having a new medical staff hired at the jail, including nurses and an epidemiologist. Their job will be to monitor inmates' health, paying special attention to MRSA. But since, by Jackson's estimate, a quarter of the jail's cases come from outside, health care providers on the outside will have to up their vigilance, too.

John Rabe, 89.3-KPCC.