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Community Associated Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (CA-MRSA)

The October 17, 2007 issue of JAMA reports on invasive MRSA infections from 9 communities in the US during an 18 month period, and that MRSA may cause more deaths than HIV-AIDS. Major news stories this week include MRSA outbreaks in U.S. schools, 3 community-associated MRSA-related deaths in children in New Hampshire, Virginia, and Mississippi, and a school closure in Indiana after one case of MRSA. As a consequence, significant public interest and apprehension has been generated with regard to MRSA.

MRSA infections have been traditionally healthcare associated (HA-MRSA). However, the incidence of community associated MRSA (CA-MRSA) has increased in recent years. Groups at risk for CA-MRSA have included athletes, preschool children, the incarcerated, men who have sex with men, homeless & shelter residents, and substance abusers. More recently, individuals without identified risks for CA-MRSA or HA-MRSA have been diagnosed with MRSA. There is evidence that CA-MRSA strains are emerging as the cause of a growing number of hospital-associated infections.

While CA-MRSA typically appears as a soft-tissue infection, reports of severe, even fatal, invasive infections have increased. These infections may initially be mistaken by the patient or physician as a spider or bug bite. Individuals who are treated inappropriately or incompletely for MRSA soft-tissue infections may present with recurrent soft-tissue infections or more severe disease. CA-MRSA infection has recently been associated with influenza-related necrotizing pneumonia.

In 2006, the CDC released a comprehensive report and treatment guide on CA-MRSA; the report contains a recommended protocol for treatment and follow-up of MRSA soft tissue infections. It also recommends including MRSA in the diagnostic differential for specific clinical syndromes. Culture and sensitivities are crucial for guiding treatment decisions.

Outbreaks of MRSA should be reported to the Community Epidemiology Branch at 619-515-6620. At this time, individual cases of MRSA are not reportable. The above-referenced CDC document has been posted on the EMAN website, and is also available at:

http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/pdf/ar/CAMRSA_ExpMtqStrategies.pdf

Thank you for your continued participation.

Emergency Medical Alert Network (EMAN)

County of San Diego, Health & Human Services Agency
Community Epidemiology Branch