



Germ Alert

“But I’m sure they’re spider bites, Dr Horowitz” says another patient’s mother.

“Did you see the spider bite your child?” I asked.

“Well...no, now that you mention it” she replies.

“That’s what I thought....”

So-called spider bites are often caused by a bacterium called MRSA or Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus. As the name implies, it is a resistant organism; one which was, until recently, more commonly seen in hospital settings and in places where lots of antibiotics were given. Now, we’re seeing more and more patients with community acquired MRSA (CA-MRSA). Unfortunately, this organism can be difficult to treat since the antibiotics we commonly use for skin infections are ineffective against it.

These lesions look like pimples or boils and resemble bug or spider bites. The germ is spread by skin-to skin contact, contact with items and surfaces with the germ present, and openings in the skin such as minor scrapes and cuts.

Although the lesions can usually be treated by a combination of topical prescription antibiotic and/or oral antibiotics, draining the abscesses to let out the pus is sometimes necessary. Sometimes more serious infections can get into the blood, cause pneumonia, or spread elsewhere.

The germ lives in the nose of many people and doesn’t give them any problems. It is found in the nose of up to 30% of the general population and they would never know it. Prevention is based on preventing spread of the germs. Specific recommendations from the CDC and the AAP include:

- Excellent hand hygiene – with soap for at least 15 to 20 minutes. If soap and water are unavailable, alcohol-based sanitizers should be used.
- Students should shower with soap after every athletic activity and dry with clean towels.
- Personal hygiene items should not be shared.
- Skin cuts and scrapes should be kept clean and dry to enhance the barrier to germs getting into the skin.
- Keep all wounds covered.
- Eczema should be controlled as much as possible; hygiene for those with eczema should be emphasized since children with this condition are much more likely to carry the germ.

It is important to contact your pediatrician if you think your child’s skin infection is worsening.

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