

State Health Department Advisory on Drug-Resistant Staph Infections

Albany, N.Y. (October 18, 2007) – State and local health departments have received inquiries about the public health risk from methicillin-resistant staph aureus – or MRSA – in response to findings of a U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) study on MRSA infections in the United States published yesterday in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA).

"Our goal is to not only reduce the number of infections such as MRSA in health-care facilities but to eliminate health-care setting-associated infections altogether," said State Health Commissioner Richard F. Daines, M.D.

"We recognize that MRSA is an increasing public health problem. New York State, in collaboration with the University of Rochester, has been conducting surveillance for invasive MRSA infections in Monroe County," Commissioner Daines said. "This was one of nine site findings released yesterday in the CDC study. The study described the scope and impact of MRSA infections both in health-care and community settings."

Hospital and nursing homes are currently required to report to the state Health Department outbreaks or increased incidence of MRSA in their facilities. An outbreak is defined as an increased incidence of disease **above** the facility's expected or baseline level and usually involves several cases.

Since 2004 to date, there have been 50 reports of MRSA-related outbreaks in hospitals in New York State. The state Health Department works closely with local health departments and health-care facilities on MRSA-outbreak investigations to ensure that rigorous infection control standards are in place.

Staphylococcus aureus, often referred to simply as "staph," is a bacteria commonly carried on the skin or in the nose of healthy people. Infection occurs when staph enters through a break in the skin. Staph infections, including MRSA, occur most frequently among persons in hospital and health-care facilities, such as nursing home residents, and dialysis patients.

MRSA that occurs outside health-care facilities is called community-associated MRSA or CA-MRSA. The state Health Department issued a public health advisory at http://www.nyhealth.gov/diseases/communicable/staphylococcus_aureus/methicillin_resistant/community_associated/ earlier this month about CA-MRSA to local health departments and healthcare providers to help diagnose and treat MRSA infections early, before they become serious. The advisory includes crucial information about antibiotic resistance. Patients should use antibiotics **only** as prescribed by a doctor.

In 2005, legislation was enacted authorizing the state Health Department to implement a statewide hospital infection reporting system by 2009. In accordance with the legislation, the department implemented a pilot reporting system for hospital infections in 2007. All hospitals in the state are currently participating in the pilot data collection system, which incorporates quality improvement measures, allowing hospitals to already utilize the data during the pilot. That information will be available to the public after one complete year of data has been collected.

Very preliminary data from the reporting pilot system shows that 5 percent of central-line associated bloodstream infections in critical care unit patients involve MRSA, while 95 percent of infections are not MRSA but other bacterial infections. Additionally, preliminary data for this same period show that MRSA is the fourth- leading cause associated with coronary bypass

graft surgical site infections. Approximately 10 percent of these infections were associated with MRSA; 90 percent were not MRSA. Eleven percent of colon procedures were associated with MRSA.

We share Senator Hannon's concerns about the importance of this reporting system and continue to make this a high priority, while continuing our scientific approach that will provide New Yorkers with the most reliable and accurate reporting system that for the first time will require standardized hospital infection reporting.

Steps people can take to prevent infection include:

- Keep your hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healed.
- Avoid contact with other people's wounds or bandages.
- Avoid sharing personal items such as towels or razors.

For more information about MRSA infections visit the CDC website at <http://www.cdc.gov/Features/MRSA/> and the state Health Department's website at http://www.nyhealth.gov/diseases/communicable/staphylococcus_aureus/methicillin_resistant/community_associated/.