



## Health Officials Issue Apology to Gay Community for MRSA Scare

By [GayWebMonkey.com](http://GayWebMonkey.com)

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Los Angeles, CA - Over the last few weeks, the subject of Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA) has hit the media making a big impact in the gay community. Several reputable news agencies including the *New York Times* and the *San Francisco Chronicle* published detailed studies about the spread of the disease between men who have homosexual relations. While the risk of the "superbug" does have a higher rate of infection among men who have sex with men, the University of California San Francisco, who first reported the problem, issued a public apology to the gay community for singling them out as major contributor of this potentially deadly disease.

A new strain of MRSA, named USA300, which is particularly resistant to front line antibiotics, began to appear in the gay communities of San Francisco, New York and Los Angeles, and the quick rate of infection seemed to alarm health officials. Often referred to in the media as the 'superbug', MRSA is generally transmitted from skin to skin contact and can also be spread by touching contaminated surfaces, but the germ appears to be transmitted most easily through intimate sexual contact.

The germ typically causes boils and other skin and soft-tissue infections. Though staph infections are treatable in many cases, MRSA can be serious enough to force amputation of infected limbs or lead to death. If MRSA infects the lungs, the infection can cause severe pneumonia that kills within hours, according to the original article in the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

While it is true that MRSA has been identified among men who have sex with men, it has also been found in areas where people share close quarters, such as military barracks and prisons and hospitals and athletes are highly at risk.

According to the *New York Times*, "In 1998, *The Archives of Internal Medicine* published a report on MRSA among high school wrestlers, and *The Clinical Journal of Sports Medicine* published a report calling MRSA "the latest sports epidemic."

While the spread of the disease is preventable by thorough washing with regular soap and water, the scare prompted many news-reporting agencies to refer to it as a "new gay disease."

Early last week, the UCSF Dept of Public Affairs issued an apology stating: "We regret that our recent news report (1-14-08) about an important population-based study on MRSA USA300 with public health implications contained some information that could be interpreted as misleading. We deplore negative targeting of specific populations in association with MRSA infections or other public health concerns, and we will be working to ensure that accurate information about the research is disseminated to the health community and the general public."

Although rates of MRSA are 13 to 15 times higher in men who engage in homosexual behavior, it is a disease that can affect the entire population, and gay advocacy groups felt that targeting the gay community could have negative repercussions.

"The way they keep targeting gays as if gays alone are responsible for it, it's like H.I.V./AIDS all over again," Colin Thurlow told the *New York Times*.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, also released a statement last week that said it was not a sexually transmitted disease and could be contracted through skin-to-skin contact. They reiterated that MRSA is widespread in hospitals and among hospital workers. "These infections occur in men, women, adults, children and persons of all races and sexual orientations," the statement read, adding that while the particular strain identified in the report had been found in gay men, it had also been found in people who were not gay," the statement explained.

Some religious groups, however, have suggested that the CDC and the University are down playing the role that homosexual activity has on the spread of the disease in order to be politically correct.

Matt Barber, director of cultural policy for Concerned Women of America (CWA), told the Catholic News Agency, "After 'pretty

solid' initial reporting of the outbreak, news coverage began to change when conservative groups like CWA began noting the microbe was spread primarily through male homosexual activity."

He explained in his column in *The Bulletin*, Philadelphia's family newspaper, "the actual study left little room for rationalization. It determined that the spread of MRSA "among men who have sex with men is associated with high-risk behaviors, including use of methamphetamine and other illicit drugs, sex with multiple partners, participation in a group sex party, use of the Internet for sexual contacts, skin-abrading sex and history of sexually transmitted infections."

Ultimately, the study warned, "having male-male sex seems to be a risk factor for [MRSA]."

While the reporting controversy continues to rage, more outbreaks have surfaced throughout the United States and abroad including a neonatal unit at Leeds General Infirmary in the UK and Coshocton Opportunity School in Ohio.

*Written By Dylan Vox*