Antimicrobial Resistance and Inequality: Homelessness

Persons experiencing homelessness in the United States face obstacles to self-care and personal hygiene. Clean bedding and facilities for laundering clothes, washing hands, and bathing can be difficult to access (*1*). Temporary housing solutions are often crowded and homeless persons are at higher risk of injection drug use (*1*).

Reduced hygiene and living in crowded conditions can increase homeless persons’ risks of acquiring drug-resistant skin infections like methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) (*2*). MRSA infections are more difficult to treat than ordinary Staph infections and can cause a range of complications, including pneumonia and sepsis. MRSA infections killed at least 11,000 people in the United States in 2019 (*3*).

MRSA can contaminate hard-to-avoid surfaces in shared housing, including bedding and towels, doorknobs, furniture, food preparation areas, toilet handles, and remote controls (*4*). MRSA can survive for days or even weeks (*5*) and may spread to people who touch contaminated surfaces. These bacteria can cause infections if they enter a cut, abrasion, or open wound.

After declining from 2010-2017, homelessness in the United States is on the rise again (*6*). The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic could further worsen recent trends. Ensuring all persons, regardless of housing status, have access to hygiene and sanitation facilities will be critical for preventing the spread of antibiotic resistance.

References

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