The first rapid blood test for the drug-resistant staph infection known as MRSA (methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus) was approved on January 2, 2008 by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

The MRSA staph developed when the Staphylococcus aureus bacterium had been successfully treated with Methicillin, an antibiotic. In time, a matter of years, the staph bacterium mutated and created a drug-resistant strain which can be fatal.

The new test, developed by BD Diagnostics, shortens the wait time for a MRSA diagnosis from more than two days to within two hours, which is all the time it takes for the test to identify the MRSA bacterium. This will allow quicker treatment and also help to prevent the spread by letting the patient know they are contagious quickly.

Staph infections occur most frequently among persons in hospitals and other health care facilities, and in individuals who have weakened immune systems. Both types of staph bacteria can infect healthy people as well.

According to the release, the FDA cleared the BD GeneOhm StaphSR assay based on the results of a clinical trial at five locations. The test identified 100 percent of the MRSA-positive specimens and more than 98 percent of the more common, less dangerous staph specimens.

MRSA staph started to receive heavy media coverage when a teen boy from Virginia died from a MRSA infection. The Bay Net published an article about MRSA in October 2007. MRSA is not reportable, despite its contagious nature. The article found that since MRSA is not reportable unless there was an outbreak (which is defined in the article) and that there was no way to determine if an outbreak was occurring, since it’s not reportable. The system of reporting is flawed with no one person knowing when an outbreak is occurring.

MRSA-related deaths are reported to have outpaced AIDS/HIV-related deaths in 2005. There is some hope that having a rapid test available for quick diagnosis and treatment as well as identifying outbreaks if the disease finds its way to the reportable list, will help prevent deaths.