

# Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus Aureus*

## Important Information for Patients and Visitors

### What is MRSA?

*Staphylococcus aureus* (a.k.a. "staph") is a common germ that is often carried on the skin or in the nose. MRSA stands for methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*. This type of staph is resistant to treatment with antibiotics such as methicillin and penicillin.

### What is antibiotic resistance?

Antibiotics are medications used to treat infections caused by bacteria. When these medications are no longer able to kill the bacteria, it is called antibiotic drug resistance. Antibiotic drug resistance is a growing problem in the world. This can occur naturally, but it can also occur because of overuse of antibiotics.

### Why is MRSA a problem?

In general the germ is harmless unless it finds a way into the body through a wound or break in the skin. If you have MRSA on your skin or in your nose and you are not sick then you are said to be colonized, but you can still pass the germ to others. If you have it and you are sick, then you are infected. MRSA can cause serious illness, such as surgical wound infections, urinary tract infections, bloodstream infections and pneumonia. If you have a skin infection that does not get better, you should contact your doctor.

### Who gets MRSA ?

Staph infections, including MRSA, occur most frequently among people in hospitals, and healthcare facilities (such as nursing homes and dialysis centers) who have weakened immune systems.

### How is MRSA spread?

It is passed on by skin-to-skin contact with someone who has the germ. You can also get it by touching items and surfaces that have MRSA on them such as bed rails, bedside tables, and door knobs. It can also be spread by shaking hands, contact sports like wrestling and football, or by sharing towels or athletic equipment. Poor hygiene and crowded living conditions can also lead to the spread of MRSA. People can often carry MRSA for months even after their infection has been cured.

### How is MRSA diagnosed?

An infection caused by MRSA can begin as small red bumps that resemble pimples, boils or spider bites. The infected area can also be swollen, warm or painful and have pus or drainage. The germ can rapidly gain access to other parts of the body. If the infection gets into the bloodstream it can become life threatening. Health care providers diagnose MRSA by sending a nasal swab or a sample of blood, urine, sputum, or wound drainage to the lab for identification.

### How do we prevent the spread of MRSA?

- Practice good hand hygiene:
- Keep your hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and water for at least 15 seconds or using an alcohol-based hand rub (ABHR).
- Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healed.
- Avoid contact with anyone's wound or bandage.
- Avoid sharing personal items such as towels, razors and toothbrushes.

### What about my family and visitors?

Visitors should clean their hands before entering and upon leaving the room.

### Everyday tips for when you go home

#### Good hand hygiene

The key to preventing the spread of MRSA is cleaning your hands before and after contact with the patient. Individuals should wash their hands for at least 15 seconds or use ABHR after contact with a patient, or with any items the patient has touched. Wash your hands before preparing or eating food. Keep cuts and wounds clean and covered with a clean bandage until healed.

#### Toileting / Grooming

Wash your hands thoroughly with soap after using the bathroom. The toilet should be cleaned daily with a clean cloth and disinfectant such as Lysol or bleach. Always discard the cloth after use.

#### Laundry

Clothing, bed linens and towels should be washed separately in hot water with detergent and dried using the "hot" setting on the dryer.

#### Household cleaning

Cleanliness is important in the control of germs. To kill MRSA on surfaces, use a disinfectant such as Lysol or a solution of bleach. Use enough solution to completely wet the surface and allow it to air dry. This will sufficiently reduce the amount of germs. Do not share dishes, utensils or food with anyone. If you do not have a dishwasher, wash the dishes in hot, soapy water.

### If you have questions or concerns please contact: Infection Prevention 585-275-7716

University of Rochester Medical Center  
601 Elmwood Avenue  
Rochester, NY 14642



MEDICINE of THE HIGHEST ORDER