
MRSA

Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus aureus

What is MRSA and why is it serious?

- MRSA stands for *Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus aureus*.
- *Staphylococcus aureus* or "staph" is a bacteria (germ) that lives harmlessly on the skin and in the nose of about one third of normal healthy people.
- Staph can enter the body through a break in the skin and cause an infection.
- This infection will often look like spider bites or bumps that are red, swollen, painful, and can have pus or other fluid. These infections may need to be covered and treated with antibiotics.
- If common antibiotics, like Methicillin, do not kill the staph bacteria, that means it has become resistant to those antibiotics. This type of staph is called MRSA. Resistance is to antibiotics only, not to cleaners, disinfectants or alcohol based hand rubs (hand sanitizer).
- Regular "staph" and MRSA may cause serious infections in your blood, lungs, bones, and other tissues.
- An MRSA infection can be treated successfully with the right antibiotics.

How is MRSA spread?

- In the **community**, it is spread by contact with MRSA skin infections or by sharing the personal items (towels, facecloths, housecoats, razors, etc.) with someone who has MRSA.
- In **hospitals and health-care facilities**, it is spread from one person to another, usually on the hands of caregivers or after contact with objects which have MRSA on them.

There are two ways you can have MRSA:

- **Carrier or colonized.** This means you are not sick and have no symptoms, but you still have MRSA bacteria living on your skin or in your nose. These individuals usually do not require any treatment.
- **Active infection.** This means that you have symptoms of infection such as:
 - boil, sore, or an infected cut
 - redness
 - swelling and pain
 - hot to the touch
 - pus or other drainage

Will I always have MRSA?

- Some people will become clear of MRSA. Your doctor will treat the first infection and if you remain healthy, the MRSA may disappear. Talk to your doctor about whether follow up tests are needed to see if the MRSA continues to be present on your skin or in your nose.

Can family and friends get MRSA from me?

- It is possible for family and friends to get MRSA from you, especially if they have serious health problems.
- If you are a MRSA carrier, healthy people are usually not at risk as long as you clean your hands often and have good personal hygiene.
- If you have an infection, there is an increased chance for spread because these bacteria are able to survive on surfaces for a long time. Fluid from wounds can spread infection.
- You can reduce risks to others by using the following personal care guidelines.



Living with MRSA

Personal Care Guidelines

- Wash your hands thoroughly and frequently with soap and water (See Appendix A)
- Carry alcohol-based hand rub (hand sanitizer) with you so you can clean your hands if soap and water are not available (See Appendix A).
- Bath or shower daily. An all over body wash is important to reduce the amount of germs on your skin.
- Cough into your arm/shoulder, or cover your nose and mouth with a tissue. Throw the tissue in the garbage and wash your hands.
- Keep your fingernails short to prevent germs from growing under your nails.
- Do not share towels, wash cloths, razors, toothbrushes, clothing or sporting gear with others.
- Wear clean clothes daily and wash them before wearing again.
- Wash pyjamas, sheets and towels in hot soapy water at least weekly.
- Take good care of your skin. Remember MRSA lives on your skin. Any break or crack can allow the bacteria to enter and cause an infection. If you get a cut or scrape, clean it with soap and water, then cover it with a bandage.
- See a doctor at the first sign of infection, such as redness, swelling, pain or pus.
- Tell your health care provider that you have MRSA. They will take special steps to prevent spread to others.
- If you work in a health care setting, contact your employer or Occupational Health and Safety as you may need to take special precautions at work.

Keep your environment clean.

Cleaning Guidelines

- Clean frequently touched surfaces such as light switches, door knobs, table tops, chair arms, computer keys, etc. Choose a cleaner that says "disinfectant" on the label.
- Clean and disinfect bathrooms, toilet seats, handles, and sink taps on a regular basis.
- Wash dishes and cutlery in the usual manner with dish soap and hot water or in a dishwasher.
- Wash clothing, bedding and towels in hot soapy water and dry in a hot dryer. A hot dryer will kill the germs.
- Wash bedding, clothing or towels that are soiled with body fluids or drainage, or put them into a plastic bag until they can be washed. Wash with warm soapy water with bleach (follow direction on bleach container). Use bleach for the unbleachables for clothes that can not be bleached. Dry in a hot dryer and make sure the clothes are completely dry.

Do not share any towels.

Use your own towel and store it in a separate place so others will not use it.

How do I stop MRSA from spreading?

- Follow the "Personal Care Guidelines" above.
- Cover infected areas with a bandage or dressing. Cover the bandage with clothing if possible.
- Place used bandages or dressings into a separate plastic bag then place directly into the garbage.
- Always wash your hands before and after changing or handling your bandage.
- Do not participate in contact sports until your sores have healed.
- Do not go to a public gym sauna, hot tub or pool until sores have healed.
- Wipe up any pus or other body fluid that splashes onto a surface in your home. Use a clean paper towel to wipe the area clean and then wipe with a disinfectant. Wipe down surface a second time and let it air dry.
- Disinfect all gym equipment after use. This is standard practise for gyms and the gym should supply the disinfectant.
- Shower immediately after participating in sports or working out in a gym.
- Shower well with soap before and after using a public sauna, hot tub or pool. Do

not use these facilities if you have an infection.

- Bath or shower on a daily basis or prior to sexual relations or any intimate contact. If a wound is present, in addition to daily bathing or shower, cover the wound.

What about Children and MRSA?

- If you have MRSA and there are children in your life, you can still interact with them. Wash your hands and prevent children from coming into contact with your infections by keeping wounds covered are the best ways to avoid spreading MRSA.
- If a child in your family has MRSA, keeping them out of sports, school or daycare would only be necessary if the infection can not be covered with a clean dry bandage. Otherwise closely follow the Personal Care Guidelines.

Good hygiene is the number 1 way to stop the spread of MRSA.

Remember to:

- 1. Wash your hands often.**
- 2. Take care of yourself by eating healthy and get enough rest.**
- 3. Take good care of your skin.**
- 4. Keep skin infections covered to avoid spreading MRSA to others.**

References

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Appendix A - Hand Cleaning Guidelines

Hand Cleaning with Hand Sanitizer:



- Apply sanitizer, the size of a quarter, to your palm.
- Rub all areas of the hands – the palms, backs of hands, wrists, between the fingers and the nails.
- Rub for 15 seconds until hands are dry. You need 15 seconds of wet contact time to kill the germs.
- Do not rinse off.
- Hand washing with water and soap will be required if hands are dirty.

**Remember, hand hygiene
is the best way to stop
the spread of germs.**

Hand Cleaning with Soap and Water:



- Wet hands under warm running water.
- Apply soap and rub together for at least 15 seconds.
- Wash well between the fingers and around nails, the wrists, palms and the backs of the hands.
- Rinse well with warm running water.
- Dry with a hand towel or a paper towel. A single use paper towel is best.
- Turn the tap off using a paper towel or hand towel (remember...your hands were dirty when you turned the tap on).
- Throw the paper towel in the trash. If you are using a hand towel, do not share it with other people and wash it often.
- Apply hand lotion on your hands at least daily to reduce skin breakdown due to frequent hand washing and to improve the health of your hands.