

Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA)

Patient Fact Sheet

What is MRSA?

MRSA stands for Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*. This means the organism is resistant to all penicillins and penicillin-like antibiotics. If the *Staphylococcus aureus* or “Staph” is also resistant to other antibiotics it is described as Multi-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*.

“Staph” is a type of bacteria commonly found on the skin and/or in the nose, armpits or groin of approximately one third of healthy adults. In most cases “Staph” does not cause problems, however, sometimes the bacteria can enter the body through broken skin, e.g. small cuts, grazes, insect bites, eczema. “Staph” can then cause skin infections such as boils, abscesses, wound infections or more seriously pneumonia, joint, bone, heart valve and blood infections.

What does it mean to be colonised with MRSA?

Most people who have MRSA on their body experience no symptoms or illness and are said to be colonised or carriers.

Who is at risk of MRSA infection?

If you are in hospital you are more at risk of developing an infection as your normal body defence mechanisms may be weakened by illness, surgery, medication and/or procedures. MRSA carriers who have broken skin from open wounds or dermatitis are more likely to get an infection.

How is MRSA spread?

In hospital MRSA is usually spread person to person through contact with other infected or colonised people; mostly through contaminated hands or indirectly from contaminated surfaces or medical equipment.

Can MRSA be treated?

While MRSA bacteria can be resistant to many of the commonly used antibiotics, there are options for treatment should an infection develop. If you are colonised with MRSA and you do not have an infection, antibiotics are not required and should be avoided.

Why hand hygiene is important

Our hands can transfer the bacteria to others – generally cleaning your hands (hand hygiene) is an effective way to stop the spread of MRSA.

To prevent the spread of MRSA while in hospital

Early identification through screening (testing) and Transmission Based Precautions can prevent spread in hospital. Ask staff if you would like to know more information.

In addition to the usual hygiene practices, such as staff regularly cleaning their hands, MRSA spread can be prevented by:

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- Placing you in a single room/ensuite or in a room with another MRSA colonised person
- Placing a sign on your door to alert staff to take special precautions. For further information please read our fact sheet – ‘Why am I in Isolation?’
- Staff wearing gowns and gloves when they perform direct care, e.g. changing dressings, taking blood pressure, assisting you to the bathroom.
- Placing an alert on your file – this is to alert staff to take extra precautions and guide antibiotic choices should an infection develop.
- Asking visitors to clean their hands before they enter your room and when they leave
- Asking staff if your visitors need to wear gowns and gloves when they visit you

You can help prevent the spread of MRSA while in hospital by:

- Never sharing personal or grooming items such as towels, face cloths, bed sheets, razors or toothbrushes.
 - Always practicing good hand and body hygiene.
 - Asking visitors to clean their hands before and after visiting you
 - Ensuring your visitors do not use your bathroom or sit/lie on your bed
 - Expecting all healthcare workers to clean their hands before and after contact with you
 - Asking questions of your healthcare team so you can understand about MRSA
- If you are required to leave your room for treatment under the direction of your nurse clean your hands before leaving your room. Wounds or invasive device must be securely covered to ensure there is no leakage of any body fluids. Ask staff if you would like more information

You can help prevent the spread of MRSA when at home by:

- Practicing good hand and body hygiene. People who live with you should do the same
- Keeping skin wounds clean and covered until healed, especially if you share a bed with someone
- As far as usual household cleaning goes no additional measures are required
- Taking antibiotics only as prescribed by your healthcare professional
- Informing doctors or healthcare providers that you have MRSA and following their instructions
- Unless instructed otherwise by your doctor, carry on with all your normal activities paying particular attention to hand hygiene and keeping the environment clean

Where can I get more information?

This fact sheet is a quick guide only. If you have further questions please ask your doctor or nurse. You can also visit the following websites for more information:

References

Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (2013). *Australian guidelines for the prevention and control of infection in healthcare*. Retrieved from <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/book/html-australian-guidelines-prevention-and-control-infection-healthcare-2010>

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