



Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) Fact Sheet

What is MRSA?

Everyone has bacteria (also called germs) living on their skin and in their bodies. Most germs are helpful and don't make you sick. But some germs are harmful and can cause infections. MRSA is a germ that some common antibiotics cannot kill. MRSA has become resistant to some antibiotics, so it is harder to treat MRSA infections.

What infections does MRSA cause?

MRSA infections can be minor, like an infected pimple, boil, or abscess. They can also be serious, like an infected wound or pneumonia. MRSA commonly causes skin and soft tissue infections. These infections are usually treated with drainage, wound care, and the right antibiotics.

Who can get MRSA?

Anyone can get MRSA. MRSA is more common in people who are taking antibiotics, or people being treated for health problems including people with open wounds, catheters, drainage tubes, long hospitalizations, or those who are very ill. Health Care Workers and people in Personal Care Homes or in the community are at a lower risk for MRSA infections.

Where is MRSA found?

MRSA can be found in the nose, on skin, in urine, or in wounds. It can live for days or weeks on hard surfaces such as countertops and toilets, or shared items.

How does MRSA spread?

MRSA spreads through contact with someone who is carrying or infected with MRSA. It can also be spread by touching things a person with MRSA has touched. If a person has the germs on their hands, they can pass MRSA to any person or thing they touch. This is why washing hands and cleaning touched items is so important.

How harmful is MRSA and how is it treated?

Colonization with MRSA, means that MRSA lives on you but does not cause health problems. For most people, colonization is not dangerous, and it usually won't make you sick because your immune system keeps it under control. Antibiotics are usually not necessary as colonization may go away on its own.

Infection with MRSA is when MRSA causes symptoms such as pain and fever. As with any type of infection, it can become serious. People infected with MRSA often get antibiotics that are effective against MRSA. It is very important to finish taking the whole prescription of antibiotics, even if you are feeling better.

Are special precautions necessary in a health care setting?

Special precautions (called Contact Precautions) are taken during a hospital stay to stop MRSA from spreading to other sick people. The best way to stop the spread of MRSA is for staff, clients, families and visitors to clean their hands often. Some of the precautions for a person with MRSA during a hospital stay may include the following:

- Placement of a sign on the room door to alert everyone of the precautions needed.
- Use of alcohol-based hand rub or handwashing by everyone entering and exiting the room.
- Use of a long-sleeved gown and gloves by caregivers.
- If you have to leave your hospital room, your health care providers will assist you to clean your hands well, cover any open wounds and wear clean clothes or a housecoat.
- Not visiting other areas of the hospital, including the cafeteria.

We understand these measures may be inconvenient, but it is important to protect other people from MRSA. Your cooperation is appreciated.

In a Personal Care Home, precautions are generally not required. However, these special precautions may be necessary if the person has an infection with MRSA and it cannot be contained (i.e. covering a wound with a dressing).

How can I stop MRSA from spreading at home?

There are simple things you can do to stop MRSA and other germs from spreading:

- Clean your hands regularly with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub. This is the best way to stop germs from spreading.
- Shower or bathe regularly.
- Do not share personal/grooming items such as towels, clothing, bar soap, or razors.
- Clean your home regularly, especially the kitchen and bathroom.
- Wash clothing using regular laundry soap in the regular wash cycle.
- Cover wounds that are draining with a clean, dry dressing.
- See a doctor if you have any signs of an infection such as pain and fever.
- Tell your healthcare provider if you have MRSA or you have had it in the past.

If I have an MRSA infection, is it safe for people to come to my home?

It is safe for friends and family to visit you at home if you have an MRSA infection. You may still have close contact such as hugging, kissing and handholding. Good hand hygiene should be practiced by all family members/visitors all the time.