

Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA)

What is *Staphylococcus aureus*?

Staphylococcus aureus, often called “Staph,” is a common germ that about 1 out of every 3 people has on their skin or in their nose.

This germ does not cause any problems for most people. Sometimes, it can cause serious infections such as skin or wound infections, pneumonia, blood and urinary tract infections. Antibiotics are given to kill Staph germs when they cause infections.

Some Staph are resistant, meaning they cannot be killed by the usual antibiotics. These are called Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) and are more difficult to treat.

Who Usually Gets a MRSA Infection?

- Anyone can get an MRSA infection.
- Most MRSA infections occur among people in hospitals and health care facilities (nursing homes, dialysis centers) who have other health conditions making them sick, have had medical procedures or have been treated with antibiotics.
- People who have not been in a hospital, health care facility or had a medical procedure can also get MRSA (known as community-associated MRSA). These are often skin infections or abscesses which may be treated by a health care provider.

How is MRSA Spread?

- People who have MRSA germs on their skin or who are infected with MRSA may be able to spread the germ to other people.
- Risk of getting MRSA increases with activities in places that involve crowds, skin-to-skin contact or shared personal items or equipment.

- MRSA can be passed on to bed linens, bedrails, bathroom fixtures and medical equipment. It can spread to other people on contaminated equipment and on the hands of health care providers and visitors.

For this reason, hospital patients who have MRSA are placed in contact precautions. This means that health care providers wear gowns and gloves each time they go into the patient’s room.

- There are certain risks such as taking antibiotics or staying in a health care facility that may keep you from being screened or taken off contact precautions.

What are Hospitals Doing to Prevent MRSA Infections?

- Hospital staff members are cleaning their hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub before and after every contact with patients.
- Hospital rooms and medical equipment are cleaned carefully with disinfectants.

Can Your Family Members and Friends Get MRSA While Visiting You?

To lower the chance of spreading germs, your family members and friends should clean their hands before they enter your room and when they leave.

They should ask a member of your health care team if they need to wear protective gowns and gloves when they visit you. (This is usually not needed.)

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How do You Take a Screening Test?

Your health care provider may want you to take a screening test to see if you test positive or negative for MRSA.

The test is painless. Your health care provider will wipe the inside of your nose with a cotton-tipped swab.

The sample will be tested at the lab. If your test is positive, members of your health care team will decide if precautions are needed to prevent spreading the disease to others.

How can You Prevent the Spread of MRSA at Home?

General guidelines

- Wash your hands. Use soap and warm water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, especially after changing bandages, touching the infected area, after using the bathroom and before preparing food.
 - Anyone who has close contact with you should cleanse their hands, too.
 - Follow the correct method for handwashing with soap and water:
 - Lather well. Use friction to all hand surfaces (including under the fingernails) for 15 seconds.
 - Rinse well.
 - Pat hands dry.
- Do not share personal items (such as towels, washcloths, razors or clothing).

Wound care

- Use gloves when touching any wounds or handling body fluids. Put all items soiled with body fluids (dressings, diapers, used gloves) in a plastic bag. Tie the bag securely and put it in the trash. Wash your hands after removing gloves.
- Keep wounds that are open, draining or have pus covered with clean, dry bandages.
- Follow your health care provider's instructions on proper wound care.

General cleaning

- Use a cleaner labeled “disinfectant” to clean kitchen and bathroom surfaces every day. (Read the label for how to use.)
- Be sure to disinfect surfaces you touch often such as countertops, light switches, door handles and knobs, flush and faucet handles, toilet seats, TV remotes and telephones.
- Always wash your hands well after cleaning.

How do You Handle Dirty Laundry?

MRSA can be spread by dirty clothes, towels and bedding. Here's how to handle laundry:

- Wash your hands after handling used clothes, towels or bed linens.
- Put the laundry in a plastic bag if you cannot wash it right away. Or put it in the washing machine.
- Wash your hands well.
- Use a regular laundry detergent, hot water and bleach.
- Dry the laundry in a warm or hot dryer until they are completely dry.
- Change clothing every day and bedding once a week.
- If clothing, towels or bedding become soiled, change right away and wash or bag items.
- Wash towels after each use.

Can a MRSA Infection Come Back After it is Cured?

Yes. A MRSA infection can return after it is cured. To keep this from happening, follow your health care provider's directions while you have the infection, and follow the prevention steps listed above after the infection is gone.

Adapted from the Minnesota and Wisconsin departments of health.