
MRSA
(METHICILLIN RESISTANT
STAPHYLOCOCCUS AUREUS)

WHAT IS MRSA (methicillin resistant Staphylococcus aureus)?

It is a strain of the germ, *Staphylococcus aureus* (*S.aureus*), that has developed resistance to most of the antibiotics commonly used to treat staphylococcal infections.

WHAT DOES "RESISTANT" MEAN?

It means that the germ, in this case *S.aureus*, has developed the means to fight off the effects of antibiotics that are usually used to kill them.

WHAT IS USED TO TREAT MRSA?

Very few antibiotics are effective against the MRSA germ. The most commonly used are vancomycin or clindamycin depending on the strain of MRSA. The more it is used, the more chance there is that the MRSA germ will build up resistance to it, just like the MRSA germ has built up resistance to methicillin, oxacillin and nafcillin, the antibiotics that are most effective against non-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN INFECTION AND COLONIZATION?

Infection means that there is visible activity of the body reacting to a germ: Fever, redness/swelling and/or pus at the site of the infection. Colonization means that the germ has taken up residence in or on the body, it has become part of the person's normal germ make-up, and is not currently causing infection. Persons who are colonized with MRSA have the potential to

transmit the germ to other people, even though they themselves are not ill from it.

HOW IS MRSA TRANSMITTED/SPREAD?

MRSA is passed from person to person by contact with someone who has MRSA and by contact with contaminated surfaces or items. A person who is infected or colonized with MRSA may have it in their nose as well as on their hands, and whenever they touch others, they can pass the germ along.

WHAT ARE THE DANGERS OF MRSA?

If MRSA infects someone who is already ill, it can compound the illness, especially if the person is hospitalized. It will take vancomycin or another suitable antibiotic and often more time in the hospital, to recover.

HOW IS TRANSMISSION OF MRSA PREVENTED?

- In the hospital setting, a person infected or colonized with MRSA is placed on "Contact Isolation". Those providing direct patient care to a patient with MRSA in the hospital will wear gloves and gown. This helps prevent spreading the germ from patient to patient.
 - Hospital visitors: wash hands before leaving the patient room and prior to eating food in the patient room.
 - Patient: Wash hands before leaving room.
 - Handwashing is the most important practice to prevent spreading MRSA.
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HOW DO I PRACTICE GOOD HANDWASHING?

Good handwashing technique is done by following these steps:

- use warm running water and apply soap
- lather and rub hands together, paying attention to finger tips, cuticles and under nails
- spend at least 15 seconds lathering/ washing hands
- rinse thoroughly and dry hands
- use a paper towel to turn off the faucet
- apply lotion several times throughout the day to help prevent dry, cracked skin (which can be an opening for infection)
- In the community and in the hospital, the most important practice to prevent the spread of any organism, including MRSA, is good handwashing.

MEASURES TO TAKE AT HOME:

If you are infected or colonized at the time of discharge, here are methods for preventing the spread of the organism to your family/others.

- Wash your hands well and often – you and your family and others in close contact with the patient should wash their hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based handrub,

especially after changing the bandage or touching the infected wound/drainage.

- Cover your wound – keep wounds that are draining covered. Follow your healthcare provider’s instructions on proper care of the wound.
- Do not share personal items – avoid sharing towels, washcloths, razors, clothing or uniforms.
- Handling stool, urine or wound(s) that are infected or cleaning the toilet should be done wearing gloves. Hands should be washed after taking the gloves off.
- Wash your hands after using the toilet.
- Wash your hands before you make any food and before you eat. This practice should be followed by everyone.
- Do not share eating utensils, drinking cups, straws, soda cans, etc.
- Wash dishes and eating utensils in hot soapy water or a dishwasher.
- For housekeeping, you can use a dilute solution of household bleach and water (1 part bleach to 10 parts water) made up fresh each day. Clorox wipes or other disinfectant may be used in place of the bleach and water mixture. Remember that bleach may discolor fabrics, etc.

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- A household disinfectant you purchase in the supermarket or the drugstore will work just as well.
 - MRSA and other organisms can be killed on surfaces if you wipe on the solution and let it air dry.
 - If possible, you should not share a bathroom with anyone else. If a bathroom will be shared, clean the toilet, shower chair and bathtub, etc... between use with bleach/disinfectant solution. Clean the sink at least daily with the above solution. Be especially careful to clean after you have a bowel movement.
 - Use hot soapy water for laundry.
 - No special handling of trash is required.

Always tell your physician, paramedics, nurses, or other care providers that you have MRSA. This helps prevent transmission to other patients.

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