

Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA) Fact Sheet

What is MRSA?

Staphylococcus aureus or *staph. aureus* is a common bacteria found world-wide. Many people naturally carry it in their nose and on other parts of the body with no signs of illness. These people are said to be colonized. Some people who are exposed can develop serious illnesses such as wound infections, blood infections, pneumonia and abscesses.

Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA) is a strain of these bacteria that has become resistant to many antibiotics such as penicillin. This resistance limits treatment options for people with an infection caused by MRSA. Infections with MRSA are no more severe than other staph infections.

How is MRSA spread?

MRSA, like other strains of *staph. aureus*, is transmitted by direct skin contact. It is not spread through the air like the common cold or influenza. These bacteria may also spread from one person to another via the hands of caregivers. Bacteria can be present on a person's hands after touching infected skin areas or handling soiled articles such as tissues and bandages from an infected person. Thorough hand washing with soap and water will remove the bacteria.

What is the treatment for MRSA?

People who carry the bacteria and have no signs of illness (ie, who are colonized) do not require any special medical treatment. If a person is infected with these bacteria and develops illness, treatment will be determined by his or her physician.

Who is likely to become infected with MRSA?

People who are in hospital for a long period of time, especially if they have been on antibiotics, and people who have been in an intensive care unit or burn unit are at increased risk of being colonized with MRSA.

If I am infected with MRSA, should I tell anyone?

You should tell your health care professional when you see your doctor or dentist, when you go to the hospital, or when you are asked to give your medical history.

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How can MRSA infection be prevented?

It is very important to prevent the spread of MRSA from one person to another. Very few antibiotics are effective against these bacteria. If we limit the spread, these antibiotics will be used less frequently, thus delaying the development of further resistance.

If you have MRSA, or if you are living with, visiting with, or caring for someone who has MRSA, it is important to follow these precautions:

- **Wash Your Hands:** Proper hand washing at appropriate times is the most important way to prevent the spread of MRSA as well as many other infections. Thorough hand washing with soap from a pump dispenser followed by drying with a paper towel effectively removes the bacteria. The importance of hand washing must be discussed with all family members and social contacts.
- **Personal Hygiene:** It is important to practise careful personal hygiene with good hand washing. Sanitary disposal of tissues and other articles that may be soiled by infected wounds is very important.
- **Laundry and Waste Disposal:** No special precautions are required for handling laundry or for waste disposal. The MRSA bacteria are destroyed during the laundering process, and all garbage can be put out for normal pick-up.
- **Environmental Cleaning:** Follow good house cleaning practices, paying special attention to the bedroom and bathroom. Many commercial cleansers are available. Household bleach is an effective sanitizer in a concentration of 1 part bleach to 9 parts water.
- **Client Movement:** People with MRSA should not be restricted from moving freely throughout their home or community. If the person has draining wounds, or has a tracheotomy with uncontrolled secretions, special precautions may be necessary.

Other Questions?

Talk to your health care provider or call our Communicable Disease Program at 613-966-5500 x349. Toll Free 1-800-267-2803 | TTY Dial 711 (1-800-267-6511) | www.hpepublichealth.ca

References

- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, About MRSA, September 2008.
- Heymann, D. L., (2008). *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual*. (19th Ed.). Washington, DC: American Public Health Association.

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