

Methicillin Resistant *Staphylococcus Aureus* (MRSA)

Fact Sheet

What is MRSA?

Staphylococcus aureus is a bacterium that is commonly found living on the skin of healthy people. Sometimes this bacteria enters the body and causes a minor infection such as boils and other skin conditions. More serious infections caused by *Staphylococcus aureus* include pneumonia and blood infections.

When antibiotics were first discovered they were very effective at killing off *Staphylococcus aureus* bacteria and treating these infections. However, over time the bacteria became resistant to these antibiotics. New types of antibiotics were then developed including the drug Methicillin. Some types of the *Staphylococcus aureus* bacteria have now become resistant to Methicillin and we call these bacteria MRSA.

MRSA is the abbreviation for **M**ethicillin **R**esistant **S**taphylococcus **A**ureus. Non-medical people often refer to it as 'Golden Staph'. Some people also refer to it as a 'super bug' because it is resistant to many antibiotics.

As more is learned about MRSA we have discovered that it is no longer only found in the hospital environment. MRSA is also within our community and a person who has not been in hospital may develop an MRSA infection or colonisation after coming into contact with it in the community. We also know that there is more than one type (strain) of MRSA, and each strain of MRSA is treated with different Antibiotics.

What is the difference between infection & colonisation?

Infection means that bacteria (germs) are in or on the body and makes you sick, which results in signs and symptoms such as fever, pus from a wound, diarrhoea, or pneumonia.

Colonisation means you carry the bacteria in or on your body, but you do not become sick. People who are colonised will not have signs or symptoms. Colonised patients are sometimes given treatment to prevent infection developing.

Both colonised and infected people can spread the bacteria to other patients.

Who is at risk from MRSA infections?

MRSA infections can occur in people who are

- Elderly
- Have a low immunity
- Have broken skin from wounds
- Have undergone recent Surgery
- Are undergoing renal dialysis
- Are chronically ill and have health problems such as diabetes.

How can MRSA be spread?

MRSA is spread through contact with the bacteria. This may be from contact with another person or by contact with a contaminated surface such as a hospital bed or table. To prevent the spread of MRSA to other sick patients in the hospital the nursing staff will care for you using special infection control precautions.

How will my care in hospital change?

- You will be managed using special infection control precautions until you are discharged.
- Regular and thorough hand hygiene is one of the most successful ways to prevent the spread of **ALL** infections, including MRSA.
- The hospital staff will wear protective apparel such as gloves and an apron or gown when they enter your room. If the MRSA has been found in your sputum the staff may also need to wear a mask. These items are disposed of in a separate waste bin as the staff member leaves your room.

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- You will be allocated a private room with your own en-suite facilities. We ask that your movement throughout the ward is limited to essential movement only, such as physiotherapy. If you are unsure about when you can leave your room, please speak to the nursing staff.
- A sign is placed outside your door to alert hospital staff for the need to use special protective infection control precautions. This sign also alerts visitors of the need to speak with nursing staff prior to entering your room.
- You may be asked to wash or shower with a special soap during your hospital stay; this will be provided by the nursing staff. Unless requested to by your Doctor it is no longer necessary for you to use this soap once you have gone home.

Good Hand Hygiene Practices

Hand Hygiene is the most effective way to prevent **ALL** infections, including the flu and the common cold. Encourage your family and friends to learn & maintain good hand hygiene practices every day.

Please refer to the hand hygiene information in the patient information booklet or hand hygiene leaflet available from the Infection prevention and control team.

During your stay in hospital you may have seen the staff using an alcohol-based hand rub, as an alternative to soap and water. This is available for purchase at most pharmacies. You may choose to purchase this for use at home.

Is MRSA harmful to my family and friends?

In general, exposure to MRSA does not cause infection in healthy people; this includes pregnant women, babies, and children. **Casual contact such as hugging, and kissing is OK.**

Being diagnosed with MRSA does not prevent you from continuing sexual relations with your partner, unless otherwise advised by your doctor.

If a friend or relative has had recent surgery, has an illness, or has a compromised immune system they may wish to contact the Infection Control staff or speak with their GP for further advice. To prevent the spread of MRSA the nursing staff will provide education to your visitors about the need to wash their hands before and after they enter your room. We ask that you also encourage your visitors to do this. They can use both soap and water at the wall sink in the ward, or the alcohol hand rub provided outside your room.

What happens when I go home?

- When you return home, it is important for you, your family, and your friends to continue the thorough hand washing that you have been taught in hospital.
- Always wash your hands prior to making food to eat and ask everyone in the household to do this also.
- There are no special precautions required for the washing of clothes, linen, crockery, and cutlery or for the cleaning of the bath, toilet, and shower.
- It is important that anyone assisting you with close personal care wears gloves if they are going to be in contact with any wounds, blood, urine, or faeces. They must wash their hands well, after removing their gloves and dispose of the gloves immediately in the rubbish bin.

It is important that you always tell your doctor, nurse, paramedic, or other health care provider that you have previously had MRSA. This will help to prevent the future spread of MRSA.

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Where can I get further information?

Talk to your doctor or the nurses caring for you. If you wish to speak with the Infection Control department, ask your nurse to contact us. Our office hours are 8am to 4pm Monday to Friday. Our contact numbers are:

- Office: (02) 9480 9433
- Office: (02) 9480 9732

References

NSW Dept of Health; Communicable Diseases
Factsheets - Methicillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*
(MRSA) in the community: Information for the public (1
July 2012)

Centers for Disease Prevention and Control (CDC);
General Information – Methicillin resistant
Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) (June 26, 2019)

NSW Dept of Health; Infection Prevention and Control
Policy PD2017_013

National Health and Medical Research Council;
Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of
Infection in Healthcare (2019)