

# Methicillin Resistant staphylococcus aureus (MRSA)

*The only way to tell if you have MRSA is if your doctor takes swabs or samples from boils, wounds, or other sites of infection and sends them for laboratory testing.*

Issued  
**AUGUST 2005**

## What is methicillin Resistant staphylococcus aureus?

Staphylococcus aureus are bacteria (germs) often called 'staph' or 'golden staph' that live harmlessly on the skin and in the nose. 'Staph' may cause infections on broken skin or wounds.

Methicillin is an antibiotic used to treat serious infections caused by 'staph'.

MRSA is a 'staph' bacteria that has become resistant to, and cannot be destroyed by, Methicillin.

## How can you tell if you have an infection?

The only way to tell if you have MRSA is if your doctor takes swabs or samples from boils, wounds, or other sites of infection and sends them for laboratory testing.

## What is the difference between infection and colonisation?

MRSA can cause "infection" or "colonisation".

Infection means bacteria are in, or on, the body and are making you sick.

You can get infected with MRSA in the community as well as in a hospital or other health care setting.

MRSA infections can cause:

- skin infections such as boils
- infection under the skin
- more serious infections of the bone, blood, lungs and other parts of the body.

Colonisation means the bacteria are in, or on, the body but you are not sick because of it and your hospital stay should not be increased. Colonised patients are sometimes given treatment to prevent infection developing.

Occasionally, people who are colonised with MRSA will have their surgery postponed or be moved to a single room in the hospital. This is because both colonised and infected people can spread the bacteria to other patients.

## Am I likely to get a MRSA infection?

Patients most at risk of getting MRSA are those who have:

- health problems such as diabetes
- low immunity
- broken skin from wounds
- recent surgery; and
- dermatitis.

If you have an infection which is not getting better with antibiotic treatment, you may not be on the right antibiotic for your infection. There is also a very small chance you could have MRSA.

## How is MRSA spread between patients?

The most common way MRSA can be spread is when touching someone who is colonised or infected. Touching a surface, such as a hospital bed or table, which has the bacteria on it can also spread MRSA.

## How can you prevent MRSA from spreading?

Regular and thorough hand washing is one of the most successful ways to stop the spread of MRSA. People with MRSA should wash their hands regularly, particularly after going to the toilet.

Health workers treating you should wash their hands each time they enter and leave your room. This will kill the bacteria and stop it spreading to other patients. You should not hesitate to discuss the importance of good hand cleaning with any of the staff caring for you.

Health workers may also:

- move you to a single room within the hospital
- wear a gown, or apron, and gloves if they are providing direct care.

Cleaning by housekeeping staff removes many bacteria that live on surfaces in your hospital room.

## How is an MRSA infection treated?

MRSA is often resistant to commonly prescribed antibiotics. Patients with an MRSA infection may need to be cared for by a specialist doctor so they get the right treatment and antibiotics.

Your doctor may order regular laboratory tests to check if you continue to have MRSA during and after treatment

## How can I protect my family and friends from infection?

The staff will give your visitors specific advice about hand washing with water and liquid soap each time they enter and leave your room. It is also important they do not have any contact with your wounds or soiled bandages. Exposure to someone with MRSA should not harm healthy people, including pregnant women, children and babies.

## What happens when I get home?

Thorough hand washing is essential for you and everyone else in the home. Normal household cleaning and laundry practices are sufficient. When seeing new doctors or if you return to hospital it is important to tell health workers about any previous or current MRSA infections or colonisations.

## Where can I get further information?

Talk to your doctor or the nurses caring for you.