Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA): What You Need to Know

What is MRSA?

- Everyone has germs (bacteria) living on their skin and in their bodies. This is normal. Most bacteria are helpful and don’t make you sick. MRSA is a type of germ that’s become resistant to some commonly used antibiotics like methicillin. This makes it harder to treat infections caused by MRSA.

- MRSA infections can be minor, like a pimple, boil, or abscess. They can also be serious, like an infected incision or pneumonia. MRSA that’s spread outside of a health care site most commonly causes skin and soft tissue infections. These infections are usually treated with drainage, wound care, and the right antibiotics.

- MRSA is more common in people who are taking antibiotics or being treated for a health issue. However, anyone can get MRSA. If someone gets MRSA outside of a health care facility, it’s called community-associated MRSA.

How does MRSA spread?

- MRSA can be found on the skin, in stool, urine, or in wounds. It can live on hard surfaces (e.g., countertops, toilets, equipment) for days or even weeks.

- MRSA is spread through contact with someone who’s carrying or infected with MRSA. It can be passed from dirty hands to any person, object, or surface they touch.

- If you touch an object or surface that has MRSA on it, you can spread the MRSA to another person or another object.

- If you clean your hands with soap and water, or an alcohol-based hand rub, your hands usually won’t have MRSA on them. However, if your surroundings aren’t properly cleaned your hands can very quickly get MRSA on them again. Cleaning your hands often is the best way to stop the spread of MRSA.

- There are 5 risk factors for getting MRSA outside of a health care site:
  1. crowded conditions
  2. close contact
  3. an environment that’s not clean
  4. sharing personal items
  5. cuts, cracked skin, or open sores (such as a sore that’s leaking)

What do colonization and infection mean?

- **Colonization** – This is when the germ is found on your body but it doesn’t make you sick. Some people normally have MRSA on their body. MRSA can colonize the nose, skin, and moist areas on your body, like your groin.

- **Infection** – Infection is what happens when a germ makes you sick. Some people may be at more risk for infection. Symptoms may include pain and fever. As with any other type of infection, some infections can become serious.
How is MRSA treated?

- People who are carriers aren’t usually treated with antibiotics. Colonization with MRSA may go away without any treatment.
- People infected with MRSA are often given antibiotics. It’s very important to finish the prescription for antibiotics, even if you’re feeling better.

What can I do to stop the spread of MRSA?

- Clean your hands often with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub. If your hands look or feel dirty, use soap and water. Don’t use antibacterial soap.
- Always clean your hands after touching anything that has touched an open sore.
- Keep open sores covered with clean, dry bandages. If you can’t keep the sore covered, don’t do anything where you’ll contact someone else’s skin (such as sports) until the sore is healed or can be covered.
- If you or someone you know has an open sore, don’t share personal items such as towels, clothing, bedding, or bar soap.
- Practice good hygiene. Shower or bathe regularly.
- Wash your clothes in a washing machine using laundry soap.
- If you think you have an infection, see a doctor as soon as possible.

**Washing your hands is the best way to stop the spread of MRSA**

**How to wash your hands with plain soap and water**

1. Wet your hands with warm water.
2. Apply soap and rub for at least 15 seconds. Include the front and back of your hands, between your fingers, fingertips, around your nails (especially cuticles), thumbs, and your wrists.
3. Rinse well.
4. Pat your hands dry. If you have an open sore, use a towel that no one else will use, or a paper towel.
5. Use a paper towel or your elbow to turn off the taps.

**How to use alcohol-based hand rub**

Always choose an alcohol-based hand rub that has 70–90% alcohol in it.

1. Put on enough of the alcohol-based hand rub to wet your hands.
2. Rub into your hands, making sure to cover the front and back of your hands, between your fingers, fingertips, around your nails (especially cuticles), thumbs, and your wrists.
3. Rub your hands for at least 15 seconds then keep rubbing until your hands are dry.

If your hands look or feel dirty wash them with soap and water. If there’s no soap and water, clean your hands with a pre-moistened towelette until the dirt’s gone, then use an alcohol-based hand rub.

**For 24/7 nurse advice and general health information, call Health Link at 811.**

This content may be updated without notice.

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