



## WHAT IS MRSA?

*Staphylococcus (STAFF-ih-low-KOCK-us) aureus (ARE-ee-us) is a type of bacteria, or germ. These bacteria are often called “staph.” Staph bacteria can live in the nose and on the skin. 1 in 5 people have these bacteria.*

*In most cases, Staph bacteria cause no infection. But in some people, Staph can cause serious infections such as pneumonia, wound infections, and blood infections.*

*Methicillin (meth-ih-SILL-in) is an antibiotic often used to treat Staph infections. When Staph is “methicillin resistant,” most antibiotics cannot kill the bacteria. Methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus bacteria are called “MRSA” for short.*

## HOW IS MRSA SPREAD?

*MRSA can be spread by contact with someone’s skin infection or personal items they have used, like a towel, bandages or personal hygiene items.*

*In the health care setting MRSA is more likely to be spread on unclean hands or equipment.*

## WHO GETS MRSA?

*MRSA in the community is widespread and therefore, anyone is at risk. People with the greatest opportunity for exposure are those in locations where there is shared space, such as dormitories, military barracks, locker rooms, correctional facilities and daycare centers. In the health care setting, those more likely to get infected or colonized with MRSA are those who:*

- *Are very ill*
- *Are in the hospital for a long time*
- *Have a serious disease that harms the body’s ability to fight infection*
- *Have taken many antibiotics*

## HOW CAN I PREVENT A MRSA INFECTION?

- *Wash or sanitize your hands often to help protect yourself from infections. It is especially important after direct contact with another person’s skin.*
- *Use a waterless cleaning gel (hand sanitizer) that is a minimum of 60 percent alcohol. Apply the recommended amount. Rub your hands together. Cover all surfaces of your hands and fingers until they are dry. Keep a small bottle in your glove compartment, purse, pocket, or back-pack.*
- *Using soap and water, rub both sides of your hands vigorously. Remember to clean between your fingers. Count out at least 15 seconds while rubbing your hands before rinsing. (Sing the Happy Birthday song in your head to measure the time. Check yourself one time to be sure you are not singing too fast.) In a public restroom, turn off the faucet with a paper towel, not with your clean hands. If possible, avoid touching the handle of the towel dispenser. Pat your hands dry or use the air blower in the restroom.*
- *Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until they have healed.*
- *Avoid contact with other people’s wounds or bandages.*
- *Avoid sharing personal items such as towels, washcloths, deodorants, bars of soap, toothbrushes, and razors. Sharing these items may transfer staph from one person to another. Change and wash your bed sheets often.*
- *Keep your skin healthy. Avoid getting dry, cracked skin, especially during the winter. Healthy skin helps to keep the Staph on the surface of your skin from causing an infection beneath your skin.*



- Contact your doctor if you have a skin infection that does not improve.

## **WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF A MRSA INFECTION?**

An infection can start when MRSA gets into a cut, scrape, or other break in the skin.

Pimples, rashes, or pus-filled boils, especially when warm, painful, red, or swollen, can mean a staph or MRSA skin infection.

Occasionally, staph can cause more serious problems. These problems include:

- High fever
- Swelling, heat, and pain around a wound
- Headache
- Fatigue

## **HOW WILL I KNOW I HAVE A MRSA INFECTION OR COLONIZATION?**

Lab tests are the only way to tell if you have a MRSA infection. These tests will help your doctor decide which antibiotic should be used for treatment, if antibiotic treatment is necessary.

If an infection your doctor will usually take a sample on a swab (like a Q-tip) from the infected area. It will be sent to a lab to see if the infection is caused by MRSA.

If checking for a MRSA Colonization your doctor will take a sample on a swab inside the nose and or armpit or groin.

## **WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I HAVE A MRSA INFECTION?**

- Keep the infected area covered with clean, dry bandages.
- Clean your hands frequently as described above especially after changing your bandages or touching the infected skin. Place the dressing in a plastic bag, tie it closed, and throw it away promptly.
- Tell any health care providers who treat you that you have a history of MRSA.
- Follow the practices outlined below.

## **WHAT HAPPENS IF I HAVE MRSA AND I AM IN THE HOSPITAL?**

MRSA can also be spread to objects and other surfaces in a room. Hospitals and other health care centers may use special precautions (pre-CAW-shuns) to help prevent the spread of MRSA. Patients with MRSA are placed on special precautions. This means:

- Patients have a private room if one is available. If a private room is not available, two people with MRSA may share a room.
- Staff may wear gown, gloves and sometimes a mask when caring for you.
- Generally, patients with MRSA should not sit in patient lounges or go to the cafeteria.
- During repeat visits to the hospital, special precautions may be used.

## **WHAT SHOULD I DO ABOUT WORK OR SCHOOL?**

Ask your doctor. Most people with a MRSA infection can attend school or work. Contact your Health Office/ Department.



## **AT HOME WITH MRSA**

*You can return to your normal routine:*

- *You may go out in public.*
- *Good hand washing by every person in the house is very important.*
- *Laundry and dishes can be done as usual.*
- *No special cleaning is required.*
- *Keep draining wounds covered and contained.*
- *You should tell anyone caring for you that you have MRSA.*

## **CAN I BE CLEARED OF MRSA?**

*Yes, by following the clearance process prescribed by your doctor. If you have questions contact your doctor or Infection Prevention & Control Department at DHR.*

**For more information** visit the Center for Disease Control page on MRSA: <https://www.cdc.gov/mrsa/index.html>

## **IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS**

*If you have any questions, please ask your doctor or nurse. You also may contact DHR Health's Department of Infection Prevention and Control at (956) 362-7850.*