

What is MRSA?

Information for patients and families

Read this brochure to learn about:

- what MRSA is
- how you can get it
- what happens if you have it
- where to find more information



What is MRSA?

MRSA stands for **m**ethicillin-**r**esistant **s**taphylococcus **a**ureus. It's a bacteria normally found on the skin and in the nose of healthy people.

Sometimes bacteria can become resistant to the antibiotics we use to treat infections. MRSA is a type of Staphylococcus aureus bacteria that is resistant to the antibiotic called methicillin.



What is colonization and MRSA infection?

MRSA can live on some people's skin without anyone noticing. This is called **colonization**. Sometimes MRSA can also cause infections. Infections happen when bacteria get into tissues and cause symptoms such as fever or pain.

MRSA can cause minor skin infections such as boils, or infections in a surgical incision site.

Who can have MRSA?

Anyone can have MRSA. People who have weak immune systems or who are on antibiotics are at greater risk of getting MRSA. Patients who have been in the hospital for a long time or have had many medical procedures are also more at risk of getting MRSA than healthy people.

How does MRSA spread?

In the hospital, MRSA may spread by direct touch or coming into contact with a contaminated surface. If you don't wash your hands and then touch a patient who is at risk, the patient may get the bacteria. Washing your hands is a simple way to protect against spreading MRSA.

What happens if I have MRSA?

If you carry MRSA or we think you may have it, we follow these safety rules (precautions) while you are in the hospital:

- You are moved to a single room. This is called isolation. It is an important way to stop the spread of MRSA to other people.
- We ask you to wash your hands regularly with soap and water or use alcohol-based hand gel, especially after using the bathroom.
- We put a sign on the door with instructions for all staff and visitors.
- Everyone entering your room will wear a gown, gloves and mask.

- We provide your care in your room. You may only leave the room with permission from Infection Prevention and Control personnel. Before leaving the room you must wash your hands and wear a fresh clean gown.
- We will clean and disinfect the surfaces and equipment in your room every day.

Common questions about MRSA

Can I have visitors while I'm in the hospital?

Your family is welcome to visit you. They must follow hospital visiting rules. Family and friends should also follow instructions from the hospital staff and the signs posted on your door.

Will I have to stay in hospital until my MRSA clears up?

No, it is safe for you to go home with MRSA.

Is my family at risk when I go home?

Healthy people at home are rarely at risk for developing an MRSA infection as long as they wash their hands often.

It is important that you tell your doctor or nurse if you live with someone who has a long-term illness or is getting medical treatments such as kidney dialysis or intravenous (IV) medication. This person may be at risk for MRSA.

To prevent the spread of MRSA at home

- Everyone in your home should wash their hands often.
- Wash dishes and laundry as usual. Hot water and dish or laundry detergent clean well enough.
- Clean surfaces such as counters, sinks and cupboards with a disinfectant like Lysol® or Mr. Clean®.

How to stop the spread of MRSA in the community

Whenever you need health care at home or at a doctor's office, clinic or hospital, tell the staff that you have had MRSA. If you have visiting nurses, they may wear gloves, a gown and a mask to protect themselves and to help stop the spread of germs and MRSA to others.

Once you have had MRSA, you may have MRSA for a long time. So any time that you go to the hospital or clinic, please tell your nurse or doctor that you have or had MRSA before.

Washing your hands is very important to stop the spread of MRSA. It will also protect you from catching other germs.



Who can I talk to if I have questions?

If you have questions or concerns about stopping the spread of infection:

- ask your nurse to call Infection Prevention and Control
- email us at InfectionControlUHN@uhn.ca

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