



MRSA

Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

What is MRSA?

Staphylococcus aureus is a bacteria that normally lives on human skin and in warm, moist areas of the body, such as in the nose. It does not usually cause any harm. Methicillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) is a strain that is resistant to antibiotics.

What types of infections does MRSA cause?

MRSA is not usually harmful to healthy people, but can cause serious infection for those who are seriously ill. The type of infection depends on the body site affected. MRSA can cause skin infections, bloodstream infections or pneumonia.

What is the difference between “colonization” and “infection”?

MRSA can affect people in two different ways – colonization or infection. If the person carries the organism in their nose or other parts of their body with no signs of illness, the person is said to be colonized. If the person shows signs of illness at the site with MRSA, they are said to be infected.

How is MRSA spread?

MRSA is transmitted by direct skin contact between one person and another. It is not spread through the air like the common cold or influenza viruses. It is usually spread through direct contact with the hands of caregivers who picked up MRSA on their skin from touching infected skin areas or from handling soiled articles such as bandages.

Who gets MRSA?

People are at greater risk of acquiring MRSA if they have had:

- Invasive procedures
- Prior treatment with antibiotics
- A prolonged hospital stay
- Surgical wound infection

Can MRSA be treated?

People who carry MRSA with no illness do not require any special medical treatment. Infection with MRSA can still be treated with a limited number of antibiotics to which the organism is susceptible. Serious infections may require hospitalization and treatment with IV antibiotics.

What types of precautions are needed when caring for people with MRSA?

In the hospital, patients with MRSA will have:

- Private room or be placed with an appropriate roommate (low risk of transmission between the two patients)
- Staff entering the room will wear gown and gloves.
- Sign on the door to remind staff of the precautions to take:
 - Put on gowns and gloves when entering the room
 - Remove gowns and gloves upon leaving the room
 - Perform hand hygiene

In long term care, the resident with MRSA will have:

- Gloves must be worn when providing direct care for residents with MRSA
- Gowns should be worn if there is a chance that the caregiver's clothing may be soiled

In their own home, clients will:

- Notify healthcare providers of their MRSA status
- The risk of transmission to healthy household members is low.
- Ensure good hand hygiene, and keep the environment clean to reduce the risk of MRSA transmission.

Hand Hygiene

Hand hygiene is cleaning the hands with alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water.

Hand hygiene must be performed by all staff before and after each contact with client/patient/resident. Clients/patients/residents should be encouraged and assisted in performing hand hygiene.

REFERENCES

Mount Sinai Hospital FAQ: Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus, 2005

Middlesex-London Health Unit, Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus, September 2004

**For more information, contact the
South Eastern Ontario Infection Control Network
At 613-548-3921 or 1-866-883-8428.**