

Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus Aureus*

What are Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus Aureus* (MRSA)?

Staphylococcus aureus (*S. aureus*) are bacteria found in the nose and/or on the skin of about 3 out of 10 healthy people. Most people don't know that they are carrying *S. aureus* bacteria.

When these bacteria are in your nose or on the surface of your skin, they will not normally harm you. However, if *S. aureus* does get into or through your skin, they can cause a variety of infections, such as skin and wound infections. Sometimes, *S. aureus* can cause serious infections in your blood, lungs or other tissues.

Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSAs) are strains of *S. aureus* that have become resistant to some antibiotics that are commonly used to treat *S. aureus* infections. ***MRSA is not easier to catch and do not cause more severe infections than other S. aureus.***

Why is MRSA a concern?

MRSA infections are more difficult to treat because MRSA is resistant to some common antibiotics. There are fewer antibiotics that doctors can use to treat infections caused by these bacteria.

How is MRSA spread?

Because *S. aureus* can be on the surface of a person's skin, the most common way MRSA spreads from person to person is by direct contact.

A much less common way it can spread is by touching surfaces like railings, faucets, or handles that may have been contaminated with MRSA.

If you have MRSA, you can prevent the spread by keeping wounds covered, washing your hands regularly, and avoiding sharing personal items such as towels, washcloths, razors, clothing, or uniforms that may have had contact with a contaminated wound or bandage.

How common is MRSA?

Hospitals and laboratories in Santa Clara County now report that upwards of 50% of all *S. aureus* isolates are MRSA. The number of *S. aureus* infections that are resistant to common antibiotics is growing. Most persons are identified as carriers of MRSA during routine testing of nose or skin swabs taken before or during a stay in hospital. Others are identified when testing is done if an MRSA infection occurs.

What are your chances of getting infected with MRSA?

If you are healthy and living in the community, your chances of becoming sick with MRSA are low, even if you have been in contact with someone with MRSA (for example, at work).

You may be at higher risk if you have had long-term, frequent, or intensive use of antibiotics. You may also be at higher risk if you have had intensive hospital care or surgery, particularly in hospitals where previous cases of MRSA have been often reported. Injection drug users and people with long-term illnesses are also at higher risk.

How long does MRSA last?

Healthy people can carry MRSA in their nose, on their skin, or in wounds that do not heal for weeks or even years. People who carry MRSA can sometimes clear the bacteria from their bodies but the MRSA can return particularly in people who take antibiotics.

How are MRSA infections treated?

If you are carrying MRSA in your nose or on your skin and you are healthy, ***you do not need treatment and you should continue with your normal activities.*** Although you do not pose a health risk to your family, co-workers, or to the public, it is important for you to wash your hands regularly using soap and water. Using an alcohol hand rub may help stop you from spreading MRSA when touching surfaces with your hands. You do not need to disclose to your workplace, school or daycare setting the fact that you carry MRSA.

Mild infections of the skin often may not need to be treated. If necessary, antibiotics will be prescribed by your doctor.

How can you prevent MRSA infections?

There is no vaccine to protect you from MRSA. The most important thing you can do is wash your hands *before* eating, drinking, smoking or applying personal care products, and *after* using the toilet. Wash your hands well for at least fifteen seconds using warm water and soap, and use a paper towel to dry your hands.

Bacteria can survive on surfaces like railings, faucets and handles for up to seven days. Routine cleaning of these surfaces with regular household cleaners can also help reduce spread of bacteria.

MRSA and hospital visits

While in hospital, visitors will need to follow hospital guidelines to prevent the spread of MRSA. This will include washing your hands or using alcohol hand rub when entering and leaving the hospital and/or the patient's room. **Important:** If you may be a carrier of MRSA and are going to be admitted into hospital, it is *very* important for you to let hospital admitting staff know. Steps will be taken to protect other patients and hospital staff from MRSA infection.