

Methicillin Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA)

A Guide for Patients

Hospitality
Healing
Stewardship
Respect

Calvary Hospital Infection Control & Staff Health Department

What is MRSA?

Staphylococcus aureus is a bacteria that can live on the skin of healthy people. Over time some of these bacteria have become resistant to antibiotics. This means the bacteria are no longer killed by the regular antibiotics.

These resistant bacteria are called MRSA which stands for **M**ethicillin **R**esistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA). Often MRSA is incorrectly referred to as 'Golden Staph', however this term covers all types of *Staphylococcus aureus*. There are a number of different types of MRSA. Some are from the community and others are related to healthcare contact.

How is MRSA diagnosed?

A skin or nose swab or sample of urine or sputum may be collected and sent to the laboratory for testing. The laboratory will check if the bacteria are resistant to certain antibiotics.

Is it harmful to you?

MRSA is not usually a problem for healthy people and it can live on a person's body without causing any harm. This is called being 'colonised' with MRSA. However MRSA can cause infections if it gets into the body. MRSA can cause skin infections or can infect wounds; this can be a problem for patients in hospital.

Where did the MRSA come from?

You may have had MRSA before you came into hospital or you may have picked it up in hospital.

How is MRSA spread?

MRSA is spread from person to person or from contact with contaminated equipment or the environment. The hands of health care workers who have not performed hand hygiene properly after contact with an MRSA patient or equipment are a common means of spread. For this reason it is important that all staff and visitors wash their hands or use alcohol based hand rub before and after visiting a patient. MRSA can also be spread by touching an infected wound, or using towels, clothes or personal items that have been used by a person with MRSA.

How can you prevent the spread?

Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water or use alcohol based hand rub:

- Before & after touching an infected area
- After blowing your nose
- Before handling or eating food

Ask staff and your visitors to wash their hands or use hand rub before and after they touch or visit you. Whenever possible, avoid touching the part of your body that has MRSA. Keep sores and wounds covered whenever possible. Don't share clothes, towels, bed linen, nail scissors, tweezers, razors or toothbrushes.

What will happen while you are in hospital?

You will be placed in a single room or in a shared room with other MRSA patients. Staff need to wear a yellow gown and gloves when entering your room or bed space, this is to prevent the spread of MRSA to other patients. More swabs or specimens may be collected to determine where the MRSA is located.

If you have an infection with MRSA the doctor may treat you with antibiotics that can kill the MRSA.

It is important that you remain in your room to reduce the risk of spreading the MRSA bacteria. If you need to leave your room, your hands should be washed prior to leaving. It is important that you do not visit patients in the ward or in other wards in the hospital.

If you are required to visit other departments for specific tests e.g. X-ray, the staff caring for you will inform the department before you are transferred there. Staff such as ward services officers and the staff performing the procedure on you will wear a gown and gloves. If they do not, please inform them that you have MRSA and that they should be taking precautions.

Your room or bed space should be cleaned each day. If this doesn't occur please inform the nurse caring for you.

What happens when I go home?

There is no need to do anything extra at home. Good general personal and household hygiene including hand washing is important to prevent the spread of MRSA to others.

Eating utensils and dishes can be washed as normal. If you share a bed with someone, ensure sores or wounds are covered overnight.

You can return to work when you are well and your doctor says it is OK. Any sores or wounds should be covered. If you are a healthcare worker, check with Infection Control before returning to work.

You should not participate in contact sports until the wound has healed or can be covered with a sealed bandage.

If you go to your GP or another healthcare facility please tell them you have had MRSA

Will the MRSA go away?

Some people do get rid of their MRSA. You will need to have repeated swabs / specimens collected to check if the MRSA is still present. These swabs need to be collected when you are off all antibiotics and no longer have any tubes into your body.

It is necessary to have two sets of negative specimens and swabs, collected one month apart, before you will be considered clear of MRSA. These clearance swabs cannot be collected within three months of a positive result.

Sometimes your doctor may give your antiseptic body lotion and/or antibiotic cream for your nose to help get rid of the MRSA from your body.

If you have any questions about MRSA that have not been answered here, please ask your doctor or contact Calvary Hospital Infection Control & Staff Health Department ☎ 02 6201 6844