

# Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA)

## Fact Sheet for Patient, Resident Family and Visitors

**One of the test results shows you or your family member has a germ or bacteria called Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA).**

### What is *Staphylococcus aureus*?

*Staphylococcus aureus* (*S. aureus*) is a bacteria or germ that normally lives on the skin or in the nose of many people. Usually, they are not aware of it and are completely healthy. This is called colonization. It is normal to be colonized with bacteria in many parts of our bodies. If *S. aureus* gets “inside” the body, for example, under the skin or into the lungs, it can cause infections. When it does cause infection, it is usually treated with antibiotics.

### What does antibiotic resistance mean?

Antibiotics are drugs used to treat infections caused by germs. Sometimes these drugs will no longer kill the germs and these germs are called antibiotic resistant.

### What is Methicillin Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* or MRSA?

The antibiotic used to treat *S. aureus* is a drug called methicillin. Some *S. aureus* are no longer killed by methicillin and they are called MRSA. When this happens a stronger antibiotic is needed to treat the infection. Individuals can have an infection caused by MRSA or they can just carry the germ on their skin or nose.

### How does a person get MRSA?

MRSA can be found in the community and hospital, on people and objects. MRSA can be passed from a person who is either sick with MRSA or just carrying the bacteria harmlessly on their skin or in their nose by hands of health care workers. MRSA can also live on environmental surfaces, e.g. door knobs, water taps, and equipment touched by a person with MRSA. MRSA can spread from one person to

another by directly or indirectly touching something the MRSA bacteria is on.

### Who gets MRSA?

Anyone can get MRSA. However patients in hospitals who have open wounds, catheters or drainage tubes, and those who are very ill, are most likely to get MRSA. Residents in personal care homes are at a lower risk for MRSA but a long stay in hospital, receiving a lot of antibiotics, or contact with an individual or equipment that has MRSA might increase their risk of MRSA.

The general public living in the community are at low risk of getting MRSA, so there is generally no need for special precautions in the home.

### Why are special precautions needed?

Special precautions taken during a hospital stay and may be taken with a resident in a personal care home to stop MRSA from spreading to other sick patients/residents.

### What are the special precautions?

Some of the precautions may include:

- Having patient/resident remain in a private room.
- A sign placed on the door of the room to alert everyone of the precautions needed.
- Everyone must wash their hands or use alcohol-based handrub (sanitizer) when leaving the room.
- If the patient/resident has to leave their room, their hands must be washed well or an alcohol-based handrub (sanitizer) used as well as skin wounds covered.

- If the patient is in the hospital they may not be able to go to other areas of the hospital or to the cafeteria.
- Residents may be allowed to go to other areas of the person care home, e.g. to participate in activities.
- Tests (swabs) may be done on a regular basis to see if they still carry MRSA.

### **What about family and visitors?**

Family and friends can visit but they will be told to wash their hands or use an alcohol-based handrub (sanitizer) before leaving the room. Visitors may still have close contact such as hugging, kissing and handholding. Family members rarely get MRSA. If they do, it does not usually cause a problem. Patients/residents with MRSA do not pose a risk to their families or to other healthy people.

### **What about at home?**

There are no special precautions at home except people should wash their hands often. Hands should be washed after going to the bathroom, touching their nose or their wound. This is always good to do to prevent the spread of germs, not just because someone has MRSA.

### **How can the person with MRSA help?**

- Remind all health care workers and visitors to wash their hands or use an alcohol-based handrub (sanitizer) before and after they touch the MRSA positive individual or are in the room.
- The person who has MRSA should wash their hands well or use an alcohol-based handrub (sanitizer) often. When washing their hands, turn off the taps with a paper towel to avoid getting hands dirty again.
- If another doctor, hospital or clinic is visited or they receive home care, it is important to tell staff that they have MRSA.

**Good hand washing or using alcohol-based handrub (sanitizer) is the best way to prevent the spread of these germs.**