

Infection Control: MRSA

Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

*University of
Pittsburgh
Medical Center
Information
for Patients*

What is MRSA?

Staphylococcus (STAFF-ih-low-KOCK-us) aureus (ARE-ee-us) is a type of bacteria, or germ. These bacteria are often called “Staph.” Staph bacteria can live in the nose and on the skin. 1 in 5 people has these bacteria.

In most cases, Staph bacteria cause no infection. But in some people, Staph can cause serious infections such as pneumonia, wound infections, and blood infections. Methicillin (meth-ih-SILL-in) is an antibiotic often used to treat staph infections. When Staph are “methicillin resistant,” most antibiotics cannot kill the bacteria. Methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus bacteria are called “MRSA” for short.

What is colonization?

Some people can pick up and carry MRSA on their skin for weeks or months. These people do not get sick, but they have MRSA. This is called “colonization” (CALL-uh-nih-ZAY-shun). MRSA colonization has no symptoms. Bacteria are present but do not cause an infection. The only way to check for colonization is by a test called a “culture.” A special cotton swab is gently rubbed on the skin or in the nose. This sample is tested for MRSA. The test results are ready in 2 or 3 days.

Who gets MRSA?

People more likely to get infected or colonized with MRSA are those who:

- are very ill
- are in the hospital for a long time
- have a serious disease that harms the body’s ability to fight infection
- have taken many antibiotics

Special precautions

People who have MRSA can spread it to other people. MRSA can also spread to objects and other surfaces in a room. Hospitals and other health care centers use special precautions (pree-CAW-shuns) to help prevent the spread of MRSA. Patients with MRSA are placed in isolation. This means:

- Patients have a private room, if one is available. If a private room is not available, 2 people with MRSA may share a room.
- All staff and visitors may be required to wear a gown and gloves to enter the isolation room. Sometimes a mask is also needed.



- Generally, patients with MRSA should **not** sit in patient lounges or go to the cafeteria.
- Personal items in your room can be contaminated. You should have as few personal items in the room as needed. Such items should be stored in drawers and closets to keep surfaces free to be cleaned well.
- During repeat visits to the health care facility, special precautions will be used.

If you have questions

If you have any questions about MRSA, please ask your nurse or doctor. You can also contact the hospital's Infection Control Department. Tell your nurse that you want to do so.

When you go home

When patients with MRSA are discharged, they can return to their normal routine. They may go out in public.

- At home, good hand washing by every person in the house is very important.
- Laundry and dishes can be done as usual.
- No special cleaning is required.
- Patients should tell anyone caring for them that they have MRSA. This includes home health providers, nurses, therapists, doctors' office staff, and rescue squads.



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