

MRSA- Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

What is MRSA?

MRSA is a type of bacteria, *Staphylococcus aureus* (*S. aureus*), which has become resistant to certain antibiotics. *S. aureus* is a bacteria that lives on the skin and in the noses of healthy people. It is a common cause of skin and soft tissue infections in hospitals and in the community. Most skin infections are minor (like pimples and boils) but *Staphylococcus* bacteria can cause more serious infections including wound infections, blood infections and pneumonia.

MRSA can affect people in two different ways - colonization or infection. If a person carries the organism in their nose and on other parts of the body with no signs of illness, they are colonized. If the person shows signs of illness, they are infected.

Who is at risk for MRSA infection?

Outbreaks of MRSA have been documented in hospitals, correctional facilities, military training camps, and on sports teams where close skin contact, cuts or abrasions on the skin, crowded conditions and poor hygiene may be present. While hospital-associated strains tend to infect people who are ill, elderly and/or immunocompromised; community-associated strains have been known to cause skin and soft tissue infections in younger healthier people like athletes and military recruits.

How is MRSA spread?

MRSA is spread from one person to another by **direct contact**, usually on the hands of caregivers and/or by contact **with objects** contaminated by the skin or body fluids of an infected person. It is not spread through the air like the common cold or flu. The bacteria can be present on the hands of people who are colonized with MRSA or people who have come in contact with MRSA. Handling contaminated objects such as facial tissues, athletic equipment, bar soap, and towels can also spread the bacteria.

What is the treatment for MRSA?

People who carry MRSA with no illness do not require any special medical treatment. If a person becomes ill, their health care provider will determine the appropriate treatment, which may include draining an infected wound and/or prescribing antibiotics. Hospitalization may be needed for more serious infections.

How can we prevent MRSA infection?

To prevent the spread of MRSA infection:

Wash your hands. Cleaning your hands is the single most effective way to control the spread of MRSA. The use of liquid soap and water with paper towels and/or the use of waterless alcohol-based hand rubs are very effective in removing organisms from the hands and preventing spread of the bacteria to others.

The six steps to good hand washing are:

1. Wet hands with warm running water.
2. Put liquid soap on hands.
3. Lather hands and scrub for 20 seconds.
4. Rinse under running water.
5. Dry your hands with paper towels.
6. Use the paper towel to turn off the taps.

If your hands are not visibly dirty, an alcohol-based hand rub can be added to your hand washing routine:

1. Apply the sanitizer to your hands. Use an amount about the size of a dime.
2. Rub your hands together until the hand rub is gone. Hands will feel dry in about 15 seconds.

- **Personal Hygiene.** It is important for everyone, including people with MRSA, to practice careful personal hygiene such as daily showering with soap and using clean towels. Regular changing and washing of clothes is also important.
- **Avoid sharing personal items.** Items such as bar soap, towels, bed linens, razors, sports equipment, and drug equipment should not be shared.
- **Environmental cleaning.** Shared environments like showers and beds, as well as athletic uniforms, and equipment should be cleaned routinely and additionally when soiled with body fluids. Ensure that the product used to clean is labeled with the word 'disinfectant' and follow the manufacturer's instructions for use.
- **Cover wounds.** People with open sores or wounds should keep them covered with a clean bandage and infected wounds should be assessed by a healthcare provider. Bandages should be properly disposed of in the garbage.

Community movement. People with MRSA should not be restricted from moving freely throughout their home and the community. If a person has draining wounds, or has a tracheostomy with uncontrolled secretions, special precautions may be necessary.

Laundry and waste disposal. Laundry including clothing, towels, and bed linens may be laundered in the same manner as the rest of the household laundry. MRSA bacteria are destroyed during the normal laundering process and all garbage cans can be put out for normal pick-up. No special cleaning of furniture or items like dishes is required.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Infectious Disease Control Team at 519-663-5317 ext. 2330 or go to www.healthunit.com

References:

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety. *Methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus(MRSA)* Accessed May 25, 2015 www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/biol_hazards/methicillin.html

Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion, Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee. *Annex A – Screening, testing and surveillance for antibiotic-resistant organisms (AROs)*. Annexed to: Routine Practices and Additional Precautions in All Health Care Settings. Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario; 2013.

Public Health Agency of Canada website "Fact Sheet- Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus aureus" Accessed May 25, 2015

Date of Creation: April 2009

Date of revision: May 25, 2015