



medfacts

AN EDUCATIONAL HEALTH SERIES FROM NATIONAL JEWISH HEALTH™

MRSA

(Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus)

What is Staphylococcus aureus (S. aureus)?

Staphylococcus aureus is a common bacteria (germ). This bacteria is present on the skin and in the nose of many people. For most healthy people this bacteria doesn't cause a problem. This bacteria can enter the body and cause infection. The bacteria is most likely to enter the body if:

- There is an open wound in the skin or,
- The person has a suppressed immune system.

Recently, there are increasing numbers of people having skin infections with MRSA who have no predisposing conditions.

What is MRSA?

MRSA stands for Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus. Most types of S. aureus can be treated with antibiotics. Methicillin, which is like penicillin, is one antibiotic that is often used. Over time some types of S. aureus have become resistant to methicillin. This means methicillin does not work to treat the S. aureus. Another antibiotic will need to be used to treat the S. aureus. MRSA is more difficult to treat because it is resistant to methicillin.

What is the difference between colonization and infection?

Colonization means the MRSA is present in or on the body but is not causing illness. Healthy people may carry the bacteria causing MRSA without becoming ill. Infection means the MRSA is present in or on the body and is causing illness. Symptoms of MRSA may vary depending on the part of the body that is infected. Infection can commonly occur in the skin, but can also occur in any organ in the body.

How is MRSA diagnosed?

A culture of the suspected infected areas may be sent to the lab to identify the bacteria. When the *S. aureus* is resistant to methicillin, then MRSA is diagnosed.

How is MRSA spread?

MRSA is commonly spread by direct contact. This means MRSA is often spread by the hands. MRSA can be contracted in the hospital or community setting.

How is MRSA treated?

MRSA is difficult to treat. Since the antibiotic Methicillin, does not work to treat MRSA other antibiotics are used. Even when the infection is treated MRSA is often still present on the skin or in the nose. This is why isolation is required during future hospital stays. If there are 3 negative cultures from the nose, groin and armpit, isolation may no longer be required. Your/your child's health care provider will make this assessment.

What can be done to prevent or control the spread MRSA at National Jewish?

When you visit National Jewish let the health care providers know if you/your child has MRSA. Standard precautions are taken to prevent the spread of MRSA at National Jewish. Standard precautions means you/your child will follow these guidelines:

- You/your child will be in a private room during the stay at National Jewish. Movement outside the room is limited.
- Special cleanser is available in the room for hand washing. Hand washing is recommended before leaving the room.
- A gown and gloves are worn by people who enter you/your child's room if contact with body fluids is suspected. These are removed before leaving the room.
- A mask may need to be worn also, depending on you/your child's symptoms and culture results. In this case, a mask will need to be worn by the patient when leaving the room also.

These measures will help prevent the spread of MRSA. Remember, preventing the spread of MRSA is important, because MRSA can be difficult to treat.

What is good hand washing?

Although hand washing seems simple, make sure the hand washing is effective to prevent the spread of MRSA. Use liquid soap and scrub your hands using plenty of lather for 10-15 seconds. Rinse your hands and dry them completely.

What do visitors/family members need to know while at National Jewish?

In general, healthy people are at low risk for getting infected with MRSA. Good hand washing is recommended for family and visitors before leaving the room of a person infected with MRSA. Gloves and a gown should be worn if contact with body fluids is suspected.

What precautions should family members take for infected persons at home?

Again, healthy people are at low risk for getting infected with MRSA. In the home, follow these guidelines:

- Caregivers should wash their hands with soap and water after contact with the infected person before leaving home.
- Towels used for drying hands should be used only once.
- Disposable gloves should be worn if contact with body fluids is suspected.
- Linens should be changed and washed routinely, especially if they are soiled.
- Let each health care provider know the patient is colonized/infected with MRSA.

What precautions should be taken in the school/day care setting?

The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment and the MRSA in School/Childcare Setting Working Group developed guidelines in 2003. These are available on the CDPHE website http://www.cdphe.state.co.us/dc/epidemiology/CO_MRSA_schools5_03.pdf). If you live in a different state, you may also want to check with your state health department or school district.

Remember, preventing the spread of MRSA is important, because MRSA can be difficult to treat.

Note: This information is provided to you as an educational service of LUNG LINE® (1-800-222-LUNG). It is not meant to be a substitute for consulting with your own physician.

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