

METHICILLIN RESISTANT *STAPHYLOCOCCUS AUREUS*

WHAT IS METHICILLIN RESISTANT *STAPHYLOCOCCUS AUREUS* (MRSA)?

Staphylococcus aureus (or staph) are bacteria that are found on the skin and in the nose of people. Staph are usually harmless, but they can sometimes cause infection and serious illness.

Some strains of staph have become resistant to the antibiotic methicillin and to other antibiotics that were used in the past to treat infections. Infections caused by methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) are hard to treat, as most antibiotics will not kill the bacteria.

HOW DO YOU GET MRSA INFECTIONS?

You can get infected with MRSA in the community as well as in a hospital or other health care setting.

MRSA and other staph can cause infection by getting into the body through broken skin or into the blood stream. People who have health problems such as diabetes or a poor immune system—or who have broken skin due to wounds, recent surgery, or dermatitis—are more likely than others to get a staph infection.

MRSA can cause:

- skin infections such as boils and impetigo (school sores);
- infection under the skin (cellulitis);
- more serious infections of the bone, blood, lungs and other parts of the body.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU HAVE AN MRSA INFECTION?

A doctor will take swabs or samples from boils, wounds, or other sites of infection. These samples will then be sent to a laboratory for testing.

HOW ARE MRSA INFECTIONS TREATED?

MRSA may be treated with special antibiotics. Other treatments include dressings, and surgery, depending on the type of infection. Your doctor will advise on the best treatment for your infection.

HOW ARE MRSA SPREAD?

MRSA can be spread by:

- touching or squeezing the infected body area, such as a boil or wound;
- using soiled towels, clothes or bed sheets that have been used by a person with an MRSA infection;
- using grooming items that have been used by a person with an MRSA infection;
- not washing hands carefully.

HOW CAN YOU PREVENT THE SPREAD OF MRSA?

Wash your hands

Hand washing is the most important thing to do to prevent the spread of MRSA. Wash your hands:

- before and after touching or dressing an infected area;
- after going to the toilet;
- after blowing your nose;
- before handling or eating food;
- before handling newborn babies;
- after touching or handling unwashed clothing or linen.

How should I wash my hands?

Wash all parts of your hands well using soap and running water. Rinse well and dry your hands after washing.

Cover boils or other skin infections

Cover boils or other skin infections with a watertight dressing during the daytime. A child with impetigo (small blisters or flat, honey-coloured crusty sores on the skin, caused by either *Staphylococcus* or *Streptococcus* bacteria) should not go to school or childcare until after one full day of treatment.

Don't share:

- soiled towels, clothes or bed sheets. If you share a bed with someone, keep sores or wounds dressed overnight;
- grooming items such as nail scissors, tweezers, razors and toothbrushes.

Wash towels, clothes, bed sheets and other items that might have pus or MRSA on them in a washing machine. No special washing temperature is recommended. Dry clothing and linen in direct sunlight, if possible, as sunlight kills bacteria. All eating utensils and dishes can be washed as normal.

For further information please contact your local public health unit, community health centre, or doctor.

Please note: There are more specific measures for the prevention and control of MRSA in health care settings. For information about the prevention and control of MRSA in health care settings, please see the NSW Health Infection Control Policy (2002/45), which is downloadable from NSW HealthWeb at www.health.nsw.gov.au/fcsd/rmc/cib/circulars/2002/cir2002-45.pdf or by contacting the NSW Infection Control Resource Centre on (02) 9332 9712.

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