

MRSA **(Methicillin-resistant** **Staphylococcus** **aureus)**

MRSA

What is staph?

- Staphylococcus aureus (staph) is a type of bacteria. It is commonly found on the skin and mucous membranes (nose) of healthy people. About 1 in 3 people are carriers.
- Medications called antibiotics are used to treat infections. Methicillin is an antibiotic. Most staph infections are easily treated with antibiotics.

What is MRSA?

- Sometimes, staph cannot be destroyed by methicillin or other antibiotics. When this happens, the bacteria are called resistant to methicillin. They are known as methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus (MRSA).
- MRSA **does not** spread more easily or cause worse infections than other staph. It can be harder to treat because there are fewer antibiotics that will work.

How is MRSA spread?

- MRSA can be found on the skin. The most common way it is spread is by touching other people.

- **The best way to avoid spreading MRSA is to practice good hand hygiene** (clean hands well with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub).

Screening for MRSA

- **It is important for your health care providers to know if you are carrying MRSA.** They will take special precautions, so it will not spread to other patients.
- Testing for MRSA is simple. If you have certain risk factors when you are admitted to the hospital, a member of your health care team will take swab samples from the inside of your nose, your groin area, and any open wounds or catheters (thin, hollow tubes) you have.
 - › The swab samples are taken with a stick that looks like a cotton swab.
 - › The samples will be sent to the lab for testing.
- Your doctor or nurse, or an Infection Prevention and Control practitioner from the hospital, will tell you if you have MRSA.

Care in the hospital

- If you have MRSA, your health care team will take special precautions to keep it from spreading to other patients, like:
 - › You will have your own room, when possible. There will be a sign outside your room to tell others who enter about the special precautions.
 - › You will be asked not to use shared spaces in the hospital, including kitchens, patient lounges, and other patient rooms.

Anyone who gives you direct care, including your loved ones and visitors, must wear a gown and gloves. Direct care means giving hands-on care, like:

- › Bathing and washing
- › Helping you move
- › Changing clothes, bandages, or diapers
- › Caring for open wounds or lesions
- › Taking you to the toilet

Everyone who leaves your hospital room, including you, must practice hand hygiene.

Care at home

- If you have MRSA when you are discharged from the hospital, the chance of spreading it to your loved ones is very small.
- Use liquid hand soap instead of bar soap. Bacteria can live on bar soap. Using alcohol-based hand rub is another good way to clean your hands when a sink is not available. Clean your hands well after using the toilet, changing your dressings, or caring for wounds or open sores.
- Encourage anyone who helps you with your personal care or with going to the toilet to wash their hands after contact with you.
- Clean your hands well before making or eating food. Everyone who lives with you should also do this.
- Clean your hands before leaving home. Carry alcohol-based hand rub or wipes with you to use when you are outside of your home.

Personal care

- **Do not** share items like towels, facecloths, toiletries, or razors.
- Cover any open cuts or draining sores with a clean bandage. Shower or bathe often.

Caring for others

- If you have MRSA, you can still care for others, including children.

Intimacy and sex

- You can still be intimate with your partner if you have MRSA. **It is important for both partners to have good personal hygiene.** If you have any questions, talk to your health care provider.

Cleaning your house

- You do not need to do any special cleaning of furniture or household items (like dishes). Clean bathroom fixtures (like faucets, taps, bathtubs, and showers) with a household cleaner often to help lower the spread of bacteria.

Laundry

- You may wash your clothes with the rest of the household laundry.

Household waste

- Put all personal care waste (like bandages or diapers) in plastic bags to put out with your regular garbage.

Visitors

- You may have visitors. The best way to prevent spreading MRSA is to practice good hand hygiene. Hugging, kissing, and shaking hands are OK.

- If you have any concerns or questions, talk to your health care provider.

How long will I have MRSA?

- Healthy people can carry MRSA for weeks or years in their nose, on their skin, or in wounds that do not heal.
- Some people clear MRSA from their body, but it can come back. This is more likely to happen for people who take antibiotics.
- If you are a carrier of MRSA, you can be tested in the future to see if you still carry the bacteria in your nose or on your skin.

Communication

- **Please tell all your health care providers that you have MRSA.** This will help them:
 - › plan your care.
 - › choose the right treatment for you.
 - › prevent the bacteria from being passed to other patients.
- If your health care providers do not know that you have MRSA, they may prescribe an antibiotic that is not effective. This could delay your treatment and create germs that are more resistant to certain antibiotics.

Antibiotic use

- Overuse and misuse of antibiotics can cause antibiotic resistance. Antibiotics should only be taken if prescribed by your health care provider.
- **Do not** take partial doses (part of the prescribed amount) or stop taking any medications before finishing the whole prescription. Only change your dose or stop a medication if your health care provider tells you to.

Remember: Cleaning your hands with soap and water or with alcohol-based hand rub is the best way to stop the spread of infection.

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find all patient education resources here:
www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

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