Methicillin - resistant
Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA)

Infection Prevention

Patient
information &
instructions

What is Staphylococcus aureus (S.aureus)?

Staphylococci are bacteria that usually live on our skin without causing disease. There are many different types and Staphylococcus aureus (S. aureus) is one of these.

S. aureus lives on (or ‘colonises’) the skin and inside the nostrils of around 30 percent of people and it is usually harmless. Occasionally, when there is an injury to the skin, S. aureus may cause problems.

These can include:

- Local skin infections such as:
  - blisters on the skin, pimples, boils and ‘school sores’
- Sometimes it can cause more serious infections:
  - pneumonia
  - infection of the heart valves (endocarditis)
  - bloodstream infections

What is methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus?

Over time, S. aureus has become more resistant to antibiotics used to treat it. Methicillin is an antibiotic that was introduced in the 1960s, which S. aureus quickly developed resistance to. This is known as methicillin-resistant S. aureus (MRSA) or ‘golden staph’, and caused widely publicised outbreaks in hospitals.

MRSA has now more commonly been found in the community (CA-MRSA) and can cause infections in people who have not been in hospital or had a medical procedure.

What is the difference between colonisation and infection?

Colonisation means that a person has S. aureus or MRSA living in their nostrils or on their skin, but it is not causing illness.

Infection with S. aureus or MRSA may occur on the skin, in wounds or medical devices, and sometimes in joints and heart valves. MRSA does not cause more severe infections than S. aureus, but the infection may be harder to treat because of limited antibiotic options.

Who is most at risk from an MRSA infection?

Anyone can acquire an MRSA infection, however those at most risk include:

- People with a weakened immune system
- People who have been in hospital or a nursing home for a period of time
- People who have wounds or medical devices (such as drips or catheters)

It’s OK to ask: Please feel free to remind your healthcare worker about cleaning their hands.
**Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA)**

**Infection Prevention**

**Contact information**
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**How is it treated?**

Infections with *S. aureus* including MRSA, can be treated with appropriate antibiotics. Colonisation does not usually require treatment.

**How is MRSA spread?**

In many cases, MRSA originates from the person’s own skin but may gain entry to a wound, medical device or the bloodstream, where it causes infection.

MRSA can also be shed from a person’s skin onto objects and surfaces in a room. For this reason, staff are required to regularly clean their hands and to ensure that equipment is cleaned after each use.

**How will I be cared for in hospital?**

In most cases, there will be no changes to your care or accommodation. In some circumstances, you might be given a single room during your time in hospital and staff will be required to wear gloves and gowns when caring for you.

**Hand hygiene:** It is very important that staff, patients and visitors clean their hands every time they enter or leave your room or cubicle. To clean hands, alcohol based hand rub or soap and water can be used.

**It is OK to ask:** Please feel free to remind your health care worker to clean their hands before they assist you.

**Cleaning:** The frequency of cleaning and disinfection of your room/ward may increase with a focus on cleaning of surfaces that are frequently touched e.g. door handles.

**As a patient, what should I do?**

- Ensure wounds are covered with a clean, dry, intact dressing – let your nurse know if it is peeling off
- Always clean your hands before and after touching any invasive devices, wounds or wound dressings you may have.
- Don’t share personal items like razors, towels or clothing
- Maintain good personal hygiene habits

**Is my family at risk?**

No. There are no restrictions on close contact such as kissing or hugging your family members. Healthy people are at very little risk of getting an MRSA infection.

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**Any questions?**
If you would like further information about MRSA, please contact Alfred Health Infection Prevention on (03) 9076 3139.

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**Further information:**

Better Health Channel
www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

National Safety & Quality
www.safetyandquality.gov.au/

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If you would like to provide feedback or request a copy in a different format, contact us at patient.info@alfred.org.au

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