Patient Handout: What Is MRSA?

ICU & Non-ICU

# Image: a microscopic, colored picture of Staphylococcus aureus. What Is Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA)?

*Staphylococcus aureus* is a germ that lives on skin that can sometimes cause infections. Most strains of *Staphylococcus aureus* bacteria are easily treated using regular antibiotics. However, **methicillin-resistant** *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) strains are resistant to standard antibiotics, which makes treating these infections more difficult.

### MRSA Colonization

**MRSA colonization** occurs when the germs are present on your body without causing any signs or symptoms. MRSA can live on your skin or inside your nose. MRSA can stay with you for months or years.

**Even without symptoms, you can have MRSA on your body and pass the germ to others**. The main ways that MRSA spreads is by touch or sharing personal items like towels or razors. For this reason, you must wash your hands frequently and thoroughly with soap and water and avoid sharing personal items with others.

### MRSA Infection

An **MRSA infection** happens when MRSA on your skin finds a way into deeper parts of your body—often through a scrape or a cut. The **most common symptoms** are painful boils or sores, possibly accompanied by a fever.

**Sometimes symptoms can be more severe** if MRSA finds a way into vital parts of the body, such as the lungs, blood, or heart. Open wounds, an implanted device or catheter, a surgical procedure, or a weakened immune system can sometimes allow this to happen. The risk of MRSA infection is higher for people who are in the hospital.

### MRSA Decolonization

When you are in the hospital, you might be asked to take extra stepsfor **MRSA decolonization**. This is a process to reduce the amount of MRSA germs on your body and help prevent MRSA infection. Usually, MRSA decolonization means wiping your body with a special antiseptic cloth or showering with a special soap such as with chlorhexidine gluconate and applying an ointment such as mupirocin or iodophor to the inside of your nostrils. Your healthcare team will provide you with specific instructions.

# I Was Diagnosed With a MRSA Infection at the Hospital: How Can I Help To Contain MRSA?

* Wash your hands regularly and encourage others to clean their hands too! Wear personal protective equipment (PPE), like a mask, gown, and gloves, when it is appropriate.
* Remind anyone who enters your room to wash their hands and wear PPE.
  + It is always okay to ask! Even your healthcare team can forget. This protects them and other patients, too.
* Share the fact that you have MRSA with your doctors, nurses, and other healthcare team members. This is important information to protect everyone and to make sure you get the right treatments.
* Follow the decolonization instructions that you are given. If you are not sure about something, ask!

*This document is intended to provide health-related information so that you may be better informed. It is not a substitute for your healthcare professional's medical advice and should not be relied upon for treatment for specific medical conditions.*

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