



## 15.2 Methicillin Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) Fact Sheet for Patient, Family & Visitors

**One of the test results shows you or your family member has a germ or bacteria called Methicillin Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA).**

### **What is *Staphylococcus aureus*?**

*Staphylococcus aureus* (*S. aureus*) is a bacteria or germ that normally lives on the skin or in the nose of many people. Usually, these people are completely healthy and don't know they have it. This is called colonization. It is normal to be colonized with bacteria in many parts of our bodies. If *S. aureus* gets "inside" the body, for example, under the skin or into the lungs, it may cause an infection. When it causes an infection, it is usually treated with antibiotics.

### **What does antibiotic resistance mean?**

Antibiotics are drugs used to treat infections caused by germs. Sometimes these drugs will no longer kill the germs as the germs have changed. These germs are called antibiotic resistant.

### **What is Methicillin Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* or MRSA?**

The usual treatment for *S. aureus* infections is a group of antibiotics related to penicillin, which include methicillin, oxacillin and cloxacillin. Some *S. aureus* are no longer killed by methicillin and they are called MRSA. When this happens a different antibiotic is needed to treat the infection. Individuals can have an infection caused by MRSA or they can just carry the germ on their skin or in their nose.

### **How does a person get MRSA?**

MRSA may be found in the community and hospital, on people and objects. MRSA can be passed from a person who is either sick with MRSA or just carrying the bacteria harmlessly on their skin or in their nose or by the hands of healthcare workers. MRSA can also live on things such as doorknobs, water taps, and equipment touched by a person with MRSA. MRSA can spread from one person to another by directly or indirectly touching something the MRSA bacteria are on.

### **Who gets MRSA?**

Anyone can get MRSA. However patients who have open wounds, catheters or drainage tubes, and those who are very ill, are most likely to get MRSA. The general public living in the community is at low risk of getting MRSA. At home, people should wash their hands often. There is generally no need for special precautions in the home.



### **Why are special precautions needed?**

Special precautions are taken to stop MRSA from spreading to other sick patients.

### **What are the special precautions?**

Some of the precautions may include:

- The patient will be placed in a private room or with another MRSA positive patient.
- A sign will be placed on the door of the room to alert every one of the precautions needed.
- Staff members will wear gowns and gloves when caring for the patient or if they have contact with equipment or surfaces in the room.
- Everyone must wash their hands or use alcohol based hand rub (sanitizer) when entering or leaving the room.
- If the patient has to leave their room, their hands must be washed well or an alcohol based hand rub (sanitizer) used. Wounds must be covered.
- The patient may not be able to go to other areas of the hospital or to the cafeteria.
- Tests (swabs) may be done on a regular basis to see if the patient still carries MRSA.

### **What about family and visitors?**

Family and friends may visit. They will be asked to wash their hands or use an alcohol based hand rub (sanitizer) when entering or leaving the room. Family members may still have close contact such as hugging, kissing and handholding with the patient. Family members rarely get MRSA. If they do, it does not usually cause a problem. Patients with MRSA do not pose a risk to their families or to other healthy people.

### **What about at home?**

There are no special precautions at home, except people should wash their hands often. Hands should be washed after going to the bathroom, coughing, sneezing or touching your nose or any wound. This is the best way to prevent the spread of germs, not just because someone has MRSA.

### **How can the patient with MRSA help?**

- Remind all staff and visitors to wash their hands or use an alcohol based hand rub (sanitizer) when they come in the room and before and after they touch the patient.
- The patient who has MRSA should wash their hands well or use an alcohol based hand rub (sanitizer) often. When washing their hands, they should turn off the taps with a paper towel to avoid getting their hands dirty again.



- If another doctor, hospital or clinic is visited or you receive home care, it is important for you to tell staff you have MRSA.

**Hand washing or using alcohol based hand rub (sanitizer) is the best way to prevent the spread of these germs.**