

## PREVENTING MRSA

As always, the number one form of prevention is simple—washing your hands! When washing, rub your hands together for 15 seconds or longer to create friction that will kill germs. Remember to wash your hands often either with soap and warm water or with an alcohol-based waterless hand sanitizer.

**There are other precautions you may take to help prevent MRSA.**

- Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healed, changing bandages often, especially when moisture gets under them.
- Do not use swimming pools or exercise equipment until wounds heal.
- Avoid sharing personal items such as towels, washcloths, bar soap or razors.
- Frequently clean and disinfect objects (such as gym and sports equipment) and commonly touched surfaces (keyboards, light switches and door knobs).
- Wash sheets and towels often. When collecting laundry, hold it away from your clothing in order to prevent the spread of germs.
- Wash clothes, linens and towels in hot water and laundry detergent. Using a hot drier, rather than air-drying, also helps kill bacteria.

**It's also important to use antibiotics appropriately.**

- If your physician prescribes an antibiotic, take all of the doses, even if the infection is getting better. This will help ensure that the most resistant strains of bacteria are eliminated.
- Do not save antibiotics for future use. The antibiotics you currently may be taking may not be right the next time.
- Make sure to obtain antibiotics from the proper source. Don't share antibiotics or obtain them from other countries.

This pamphlet has been created for the following:

- hospitalized patients;
- hospice patients;
- skilled nursing home residents; and
- family members of all patients.



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**PREVENTING MRSA**

*It's In Our Hands*

THE PATIENT'S GUIDE  
TO UNDERSTANDING  
& PREVENTING MRSA

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## THE FACTS ABOUT MRSA

### What is Staphylococcus aureus (staph)?

Staphylococcus aureus, commonly referred to as “staph,” refers to bacteria (germs) that are frequently carried on people’s skin or in their noses.

### What is MRSA (Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus)?

MRSA refers to the type of staph which is resistant to commonly prescribed antibiotics such as methicillin, oxacillin, penicillin and amoxicillin.

### Who gets MRSA?

Anyone may get MRSA. Within the past several years, there has been an increase in what is referred to as community-associated MRSA, which has emerged at daycare centers, gyms, schools and elsewhere in the community as one of the most common causes of skin infections. It has also historically been found among people with weakened immune systems who may be in the hospital or another healthcare facility.

### How is MRSA spread?

MRSA is spread primarily through hand-to-hand contact or touching items that a person infected with MRSA has touched. This is why hand washing is the number one way to prevent the spread of MRSA.

### What does a MRSA infection look like?

MRSA can cause skin infections that look like a pimple or boil and can be red, swollen, painful or have drainage. Some people may believe they have been bitten by a spider. MRSA may cause serious infections such as, pneumonia, blood-stream infections or surgical wound infections.

## MRSA RISKS & TREATMENT

### Is there anything that increases the risk of developing a MRSA infection?

Factors that may cause the MRSA infection are frequent use of antibiotics, not taking antibiotics as directed or taking antibiotics for a viral illness. Some patients may be at increased risk for the MRSA infection, including people with feeding tubes and those who have been hospitalized frequently or for extended periods. People in long term care facilities also are vulnerable.

### Can a MRSA infection be treated?

Yes, but since it is resistant to many common antibiotics, it can be hard to treat. Your healthcare provider may culture your infection site and have the lab test the bacteria to find out which antibiotic is best for you.

### What does it mean to be colonized with MRSA?

People colonized with MRSA carry the bacteria but don’t have symptoms of an infection. Those people usually do not need antibiotic treatment. However, they should be aware of how to protect themselves and others from becoming sick. (See *Preventing MRSA* section.)

## HOSPITALIZATION & MRSA

### How can I prevent MRSA while I’m in the hospital?

Patients must be active participants in their own care. If the patient is unable to do this, it’s good to have family members or friends available to serve as another set of eyes and ears for the patients.

Ask visitors to wash their hands when they enter and leave the room. Healthcare professionals should be washing their hands frequently and may have just done so before entering your room. Still, if you didn’t see them wash their hands you have a right to ask them to do it again. Everyone benefits from proper and frequent hand washing.

### What if I am diagnosed with an active MRSA infection?

Your doctor may choose one or more of the following options:

- drain the infection;
- prescribe antibiotics; and/or
- reduce the amount of bacteria on your skin.

In some cases, hospitalized patients may be placed in “isolation protection”. This is to help prevent the germs from spreading. A card may be placed on the door to your room alerting those who enter as to the necessary precautions they will need to take to enter the room. Hospital staff will wear gowns and gloves to care for you and may sometimes wear a mask.

**Remember:** We don’t want you to feel isolated. All of these steps are taken to keep the germs from spreading to others.

### Is it possible that my MRSA skin infection will come back after it has been treated?

Yes. It is possible to recur after it has cleared up. To prevent this from happening, follow your healthcare provider’s directions while you have the infection and follow the prevention steps after the infection is gone. (See *Preventing MRSA* section.)

### Call your doctor if:

- you have signs of infection such as pain, redness, swelling, heat or drainage;
- you have a wound that is draining and not healed after several days; or
- new symptoms develop during or after your treatment.