

Methacillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (M R S A)

PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET

What is MRSA?

Staphylococcus aureus, often referred to as “staph”, is a bacteria commonly found on the skin of healthy people. Occasionally, staph can get into the body and cause an infection. The infection can be minor (such as boils or pimples) or serious (such as blood infections or pneumonia). Methacillin is an antibiotic commonly used to treat staph infections. Although methacillin is very effective in treating most staph infections, some staph bacteria have developed resistance to methacillin and can no longer be killed by this antibiotic and may be difficult to manage with other antibiotics. These resistant bacteria are called methacillin resistant staphylococcus aureus, or MRSA.

Who gets MRSA?

Healthy people rarely get MRSA. The infection usually develops in patients in hospitals or nursing homes who are elderly or very sick, and who may be taking powerful antibiotics or who have an open wound (such as a bedsore) or a tube (such as a urinary catheter) going into their body. Individuals who are sick with weak immune systems are especially at risk of contacting MRSA. The bacteria can be found on the skin, in the nose and in blood and urine. Often a patient may be colonized with the bacteria. Colonization means that the MRSA is present on or in the body without causing infection or making the person sick. It is estimated that as many as 80,000 patients a year get MRSA. The number of individuals living in the community who are colonized with MRSA is not known.

How is MRSA treated?

Although MRSA is resistant to many antibiotics and often difficult to treat, a few antibiotics can still successfully cure MRSA infection. Patients who are colonized with MRSA usually do not need treatment.

What happens when an individual with MRSA is hospitalized?

MRSA is spread by physical contact. In the hospital, special precautions must be taken to prevent the spread of MRSA to other patients. Patients with MRSA are placed in a single room. All health care workers who enter the patient’s room must wear a mask, gown and gloves to prevent the spread of MRSA to other patients. Before leaving the room they wash their hands or use the alcohol gel provided. In addition, the patient’s movement from the room is limited to essential purposes only (e.g. for medical procedures or emergencies).

Is it safe to visit a person with MRSA?

Because healthy people are at very little risk of getting infected with MRSA, it is safe to visit when in good health. It is recommended that visitors wash thoroughly before leaving the patient's room and refrain from visiting if they are not feeling well or are caring for sick individuals at home. Persons who are ill or have weak immune systems should not visit. **It is important that all visitors wash their hands thoroughly before and after patient contact and before leaving the room.** It is not necessary for visitors to wear a gown, gloves or a mask because they are not in contact with other patients. To prevent the spread of MRSA to other patients, visitors are not permitted to enter the unit kitchen or handle supplies or linen. In addition, visitors are asked to refrain from visiting other patients. If a patient needs assistance, ask the staff for help.

How can I get more information?

If you have questions about MRSA or about how you can prevent the spread of MRSA, speak to the infection control nurse or nursing staff. Information is also available on the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Website: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/hip/Aresist/mrsafaq.htm>.

Adapted from: "MRSA Information for Patients". CDC, 2002: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/hip/Aresist/mrsafaq.htm>

For more Patient Fact Sheets, see the Greenwich Hospital web site at www.greenhosp.org and click on Patients & Visitors, then Patient Education.