

# Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA)

## What is Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA)?

*Staphylococcus aureus* is a bacterium that is normally on the skin and mucous membranes of many people, without causing illness. This is referred to as being 'colonized'. *Staphylococcus aureus* can occasionally cause mild infections (boils, impetigo) or, rarely, more serious wounds or blood infections.

MRSA is a staphylococcus aureus that has developed the ability to 'resist' treatment with certain antibiotics such as methicillin. MRSA itself is not an illness nor does it necessarily cause more serious disease (boils, impetigo, blood infections). MRSA requires different and often more expensive antibiotics. Just as with *Staphylococcus aureus*, a person may be colonized with MRSA.

MRSA can be health-care acquired or community acquired (CA-MRSA).

## How does MRSA spread?

MRSA is typically spread by direct contact with the bacteria. In hospital, it is usually spread via the unwashed hands of health care workers. It is also spread by sharing improperly cleaned hospital equipment between patients. Health care workers are usually transient or short-term carriers.

## Who is at risk?

The rates of MRSA have been increasing in the past several years. Hospital patients or residents of long-term care facilities are at greater risk because of their medical conditions and the amount of direct care required. Upon admission to hospital, individuals who may be screened for MRSA include those who have previously been diagnosed or colonized with MRSA, have been in a health-care facility outside of Canada in the past 12 months, have been in a health care facility for more than 12 hours in the past 12 months, or been recently been exposed to MRSA. Other risk factors may include those receiving treatment with an indwelling medical device (example-catheter), people living in shelters or correctional facilities, or injection drug users. Immuno-compromised clients have little or no defense to fight off the bacteria. Persons with healthy immune systems eventually rid the bacteria, usually within weeks.

## How do I prevent the spread of MRSA?

Controlling and preventing the spread of MRSA include:

- Hand washing/hand hygiene - good hand washing includes using soap and water for at least 15 seconds
- Clean wounds appropriately to prevent serious infections
- Hospitals and hospital workers following all recommended infection control guidelines
- Communication between health care facilities during transfer of patients/residents
- Hospital screening and surveillance programs.

*This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a health care professional about any health concerns.*

For Further Information Contact the Infectious Disease Program at 625-8318  
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