

## **Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA)**

### **PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET**

#### **What is a MRSA?**

Methicillin-resistant *staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA), also known as “staph” is a bacteria that can be difficult to treat with common antibiotics. MRSA is not commonly found on the skin of healthy people. Once in awhile, MRSA can get into the body and cause an infection. The infection can be minor such as a boil or a pimple, or serious, such as a blood stream infection or pneumonia.

**COLONIZATION** means that the MRSA bacteria are present in or on the body without causing infection or making the person sick. Less than 2% of people are colonized in the nose with MRSA bacteria.

**INFECTION** means that the bacteria are present in the body and are the cause of a minor or major infection.

#### **Who gets MRSA?**

MRSA infection and colonization occur most often among people with weakened immune systems who are in healthcare facilities such as nursing homes, hospitals, or dialysis centers. These people are often elderly, very sick, have an open wound such as a bedsore, or have a tube such as a urinary catheter going into the body.

However, there are some people in the community who have not been in a healthcare facility or had a medical procedure within the last year who can acquire a MRSA infection. This is called community-acquired MRSA and usually appears as a skin infection, such as pimples and boils.

There are other risk factors for both MRSA colonization and infection:

- severity of illness
- prior use of antibiotics
- diseases or medical conditions, such as:
  - chronic kidney disease
  - diabetes
  - peripheral vascular disease
  - dermatitis or skin lesions
- procedures or devices, such as:
  - dialysis
  - intravenous catheter (IV) for medications or fluids
  - urinary catheter
- prior admission to a hospital, nursing home, rehabilitation center or long term care facility

## **How is MRSA treated?**

Even though MRSA is difficult to treat, there are antibiotics that can successfully heal MRSA infection. Patients who are only colonized with MRSA (no active infection or illness) usually do not need treatment.

It is strongly suggested that you see your primary healthcare provider regarding specific treatment.

## **What Happens When an Individual with MRSA is hospitalized?**

MRSA is spread by physical contact with either the patient or items in the patient's room. In the hospital, special steps are taken to prevent the spread of MRSA to other patients, staff, or visitors. Patients with MRSA are placed in a single room. Everyone entering the patient's room must wear a mask, gown, and gloves to prevent the spread of MRSA. Before leaving the patient's room, everyone must remove the gown, gloves, and mask; and wash their hands or use the alcohol sanitizer provided. In addition, the patient has limited access to public areas and is required to remain in their room except for medical tests, treatments, or emergencies that require leaving the patient room.

## **Is it Safe to Visit a Person with MRSA?**

Yes, it is safe for adults to visit a person with MRSA if you follow the hospital's policy and precautions.

- ALL visitors must wash their hands for at least 15 seconds or use the alcohol sanitizer before and after patient contact, and before leaving the patient room.
- ALL visitors must wear a gown, gloves, and mask upon entering a patient room.
- DO NOT go into the supply or linen cabinet.
- DO NOT go into the kitchen on the nursing unit.
- DO NOT VISIT other patients in the hospital.

**DO NOT VISIT** a MRSA patient if you:

- Are ill or have any type of infection.
- Have a weakened immune system.

If a visitor follows the MRSA policy there should be no risk to them or others. However, it is in the best interest of the visitor with any of the above conditions to stay home.

If a patient needs assistance while you are visiting, 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 & Prevention Department at extension 3275 or a member of the nursing staff. Information is also available on the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website: <http://www.cdc.gov/index.htm>

**Resources:**

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Department of Health and Human Services. *Information & Advice for Specific Groups about MRSA Infections*. Last update August 9, 2010. <http://cdc.gov/mrsa/groups/index.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Department of Health and Human Services. *MRSA Infections*. Last update August 9, 2010. <http://www.cdc.gov/mrsa/index.html>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Department of Health and Human Services. *Prevention of MRSA in Healthcare Settings*. Last update August 9, 2010. <http://www.cdc.gov/mrsa/prevent/healthcare.html>

Washington State Department of Health. *Living with MRSA*. Last revision March 20, 2006. <http://www.doh.wa.gov/topics/antibiotics/MRSA.htm>

*For more Patient Fact Sheets, see the Greenwich Hospital web site at [www.greenwichhospital.org](http://www.greenwichhospital.org) and Click on Patients & Visitors, then Patient Education*