

Facts About Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA)

(In light of recent national publicity related to MRSA, the following fact sheet has been prepared by Conway Regional Health System for student and parent education.)

What is MRSA?

It is a strain of the Staph germ that has developed a way to fight off the effects of the antibiotics that are usually used to kill them.

What is the difference between infection and colonization?

Infection means that there is a response from your body to a germ like fever, redness, swelling and/or drainage from a wound. Colonization means that the germ is living in your body and not causing a problem at the time. People who are colonized can give it to other people. MRSA usually lives in your nose and gets on your hands. It is very important to always cover your mouth and nose when sneezing and coughing and to wash your hands or use hand gel afterwards.

What is used to treat this infection?

Several antibiotics will work. However, the more they are used, the greater the chance the MRSA germ will build up resistance to them.

How is it spread?

MRSA is passed from person to person by touch or coughing and sneezing. If you have it on your hands you can pass it on to another person and it may or may not make them sick. If you have an open wound (a cut or scrape) it can get in and cause an infection. It can cause an infection in someone who has a low immune system, like someone on chemotherapy or someone who is already sick with something else. The Staph germ can live for about a day (24 hours) on objects.

How is spreading stopped?

HAND WASHING AND CONTACT PRECAUTIONS. Everyone who comes in contact with someone who has been diagnosed with MRSA is urged to wash with soap or use hand gel before and after contact. In hospitals, contact precautions include hand washing as well as gloves and gowns. Masks may be used if there is a chance of blood, body fluids, wound drainage or stool splashing or spraying.

How do I practice good hand washing?

1. Use warm running water
2. Apply soap
3. Lather and rub hands together, especially finger tips and nails
4. Spend at least 10-15 seconds lathering and rubbing hands, this gets rid of the germs
5. Rinse well to wash the germs away
6. Pat dry
7. Use paper towel to turn off faucet
8. Apply lotion to keep hands from drying and cracking

How do I use hand gel?

1. Pump once from the dispenser
2. Rub all surfaces of you hands, especially finger tips and nails
3. Rub until gel is completely dry
4. Do not allow gel near your eyes.

How do I avoid developing a resistant germ?

1. Do not demand antibiotics from your doctor when they are not needed.
2. When taking antibiotics take them as directed. Do not quit taking them before they are all gone just because you are feeling better.
3. Do not take antibiotics that were not prescribed for you just because you have the same symptoms.

Will I always have MRSA?

Not necessarily. If your infection is treated you may not. If you are colonized you may always have it. There is a way your doctor can treat you to get rid of your colonization and you can be retested afterwards to see if it worked. You may become colonized again later. You don't really have any way of knowing where or who you picked it up from in the first place and if you visit there again you can pick up the germ again. Talk to your doctor about this.

What do to help prevent infection or spread of infection in my home?

1. Clean your hands regularly with soap and water or hand gel. Always clean your hands immediately after touching a draining wound, changing a dressing (even when you wear gloves) or sneezing or coughing on your hands.
2. Keep wounds that are draining covered with clean, dry bandages.
3. Do not share items that may be contaminated with wound drainage like towels, clothing, sheets and blankets, bar soap, and razors.
4. Wash anything that touches a draining wound (like towels) each time you use it and dry them well.
5. Clean equipment and other surfaces where bare skin has touched (bath tubs, door knobs, telephone, counters, etc.) with detergents or disinfectants that say they kill *Staphylococcus aureus* on the label. It can live for about 24 hours on surfaces and objects. 10% household bleach is an inexpensive way to clean.
6. Take a bath or shower regularly.
7. If you cannot keep a draining wound covered with a clean, dry bandage Do not participate in activities where you will have skin to skin contact with someone else (like sports) until your wound is healed.

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