



Australian Government

National Health and  
Medical Research Council

# Healthcare Associated Infection

# Methicillin Resistant

# *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA)

## Consumer factsheet

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

*Staphylococcus aureus* (often referred to as Staph) is a common bacteria that lives on the skin or in the nose of 1 in 3 people. In most cases the bacteria does not cause problems. Occasionally it can cause serious health problems such as skin or wound infections, pneumonia or infections in the blood or bone.

Methicillin Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, MRSA, (sometimes referred to as golden staph) is the name given to *Staphylococcus aureus* bacteria that is more difficult to kill because it has resistance to some antibiotics including Methicillin. MRSA is often linked to care or treatment in hospitals or health care facilities.

MRSA can cause skin infections such as abscesses and boils, and can infect wounds.

MRSA may also spread into the body and cause serious infections such as septicaemia (“blood poisoning”).

Some strains of MRSA can also occur in the community or in otherwise healthy individuals and these are referred to as non multi-resistant strains of MRSA or community acquired MRSA.

### ***Who is at an increased risk of getting an MRSA infection?***

In hospital the people who have an increased risk of getting an MRSA infection are people who:

- Have other health conditions that make them sick
- Have been in a hospital or a nursing home
- Have been treated with antibiotics.

In the community, anyone can be affected however the people at greatest risk of contracting MRSA are often found living in crowded conditions or in environments where frequent skin contact occurs, for example schools, dormitories, child care centres and gymnasiums. People with other medical conditions including diabetes, dermatitis or who are immunosuppressed are also at increased risk.

### ***How do you get an MRSA infection?***

People who have MRSA on their skin or are infected with MRSA may be able to spread the bacteria. MRSA can be passed on to others on the hands of healthcare workers, visitors and patients or via contaminated equipment such as bed rails, medical equipment and bathroom fixtures.

### ***How can you prevent the spread of MRSA?***

- The most important thing in preventing the spread of MRSA is to frequently clean your hands using an alcohol based hand rub or wash your hands with soap and water then dry them thoroughly.
- Avoid touching the part of your body that may have MRSA present, if possible.
- Follow instructions and advice given by the healthcare worker looking after you on how to manage any wounds or devices.
- Have your own towels, clothes and bed sheets. If you share a bed with someone, keep sores or wounds securely covered overnight.
- Have your own grooming items such as nail scissors, tweezers, razors and toothbrushes and don't share with others.
- All eating utensils, dishes, clothing and linen can be washed as normal.

### **When should you clean your hands?**

You should always clean your hands:

- before handling anything that goes in your mouth
- before preparing or eating food or drinks
- after going to the toilet
- after using a tissue or handkerchief
- after handling rubbish
- after handling dirty washing
- after coming into contact with an affected area (avoid touching wherever possible).

### **What happens if you have MRSA?**

- A swab from your nose and/or any wounds or lesions on your skin or, or samples of urine or sputum may be sent to a laboratory to confirm if the MRSA is confined to part of your body or if it is widespread.
- If you have a local infection such as an infected wound, or if you have a serious infection, you may be treated with antibiotics that kill MRSA (some people with MRSA may not be treated unless their doctor thinks it is necessary).
- If you have MRSA on your skin, hair or nose, you may be given an antiseptic body lotion and/or antibiotic cream.
- The healthcare facility will use special precautions to minimise risk of spreading MRSA to other patients, such as placing you in a single room and using personal protective equipment (gloves and gowns) while caring for you.
- If you are in hospital, you will be asked to stay in your room, unless receiving tests and treatment, and avoid common areas such as the cafeteria and gift shop.

### **If you have MRSA can you have visitors?**

MRSA can affect people who have certain long-term health problems. Please let the nursing staff know if someone who has a long-term health problem wants to visit you.

Your visitors will be asked to wash their hands after visiting you so that they do not spread MRSA to others. You can also encourage visitors to wash their hands before and after visiting you.

Visitors may also be asked to wear gloves or gowns, to prevent spreading MRSA to other patients.

Most patients who are colonised with MRSA do not usually have to stay longer in hospital. If you have a local infection or a serious infection, you may have to stay in hospital until it shows signs of improving or has resolved.

### **Where can you find out more information?**

Please speak to the infection control professional or the healthcare worker looking after you or your family.

Patient Information guides on healthcare associated infections, VRE and *Clostridium difficile* are available from the NHMRC website - <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au>

### **References**

NHMRC (2010) Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infection in Healthcare  
[www.nhmrc.gov.au](http://www.nhmrc.gov.au)

Hand Hygiene Australia (2008) Health Care Associated Infections  
[www.hha.org.au/ForConsumers/FactSheets.aspx#HCAI](http://www.hha.org.au/ForConsumers/FactSheets.aspx#HCAI)

Centre for Disease Control and Prevention - FAQ's about MRSA [www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/HAI\\_shea\\_idsa.html](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/HAI_shea_idsa.html)

### **Acknowledgements**

Tasmanian Infection Prevention & Control unit, Department of Health and Human Service

Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Healthcare

