

# MEDfacts

An Educational Health Series From National Jewish Health®



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

### *What is Staphylococcus aureus (S. aureus)?*

*Staphylococcus aureus* is a common bacterium (germ). It is present on the skin and in the nose of many people. For most healthy people this bacterium does not cause a problem. It can enter the body and cause infection. *Staphylococcus aureus* is most likely to enter the body if:

- There is an open wound in the skin
- The person has a suppressed immune system.

*S. aureus* can cause serious infections of skin, bloodstream, bone, lung and other sites.

### *What is MRSA?*

MRSA stands for Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*. This is a type of *S. aureus* that is resistant to some of the antibiotics that are often used to treat these infections. MRSA has become increasingly common. MRSA was initially found mostly in hospitals, but now is also found in the community. People are more likely to get a MRSA infection if they:

- Have other health conditions
- Have been in the hospital or a nursing home
- Have been treated with antibiotics.

### *What is the difference between colonization and infection?*

Colonization means MRSA is present in or on the body but is not causing illness. Healthy people may carry MRSA without becoming ill. Infection means MRSA is present in or on the body and is causing illness. Symptoms of MRSA may vary depending on the part of the body that is infected.

### *How is MRSA diagnosed?*

A culture of the suspected infected areas may be sent to the lab to identify the bacteria and test for effective antibiotics.

## **REGISTER NOW**

to Receive **FREE** Health  
Tips, Research Findings,  
Ways to Support Our  
Mission, News &  
More in Your E-Mail Box

Visit [njhealth.org/e-news](http://njhealth.org/e-news)  
for more information.

## **Follow us online!**

**facebook**

[facebook.com/NJHealth](http://facebook.com/NJHealth)

**You Tube**

[youtube.com/NationalJewish](http://youtube.com/NationalJewish)

**twitter**

[twitter.com/njhealth](http://twitter.com/njhealth)

### How is MRSA spread?

MRSA is commonly spread by direct contact. This means MRSA is often spread by the hands when patients, visitors or health care workers do not clean their hands. MRSA can also be spread by contaminated equipment. Most hospitals, including National Jewish Health, take special precautions to prevent the spread of MRSA from one patient to the next.

### How is MRSA treated?

Since MRSA is resistant to many antibiotics used to treat *S. aureus*, other antibiotics must be used. These may include oral or intravenous antibiotics. Even when the infection is treated, MRSA is often still present on the skin or in the nose (colonization).

### What is done to prevent the spread of MRSA at National Jewish Health?

When you visit National Jewish Health, let the health care providers know if you/your child has MRSA.

Standard precautions are taken with every patient to prevent the spread of MRSA and other infections at National Jewish Health. For all patients, our health care workers:

- Clean their hands with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub before and after contact with each patient.
- Clean high-touch surfaces with a disinfectant that kills MRSA and other bacteria and viruses often found in health care settings.
- Educate and encourage patients to keep their hands clean and to keep coughs and sneezes covered.
- Wear personal protective equipment such as gloves, gowns and/or masks to protect their skin, clothing, eyes, mouth and nose when performing certain tasks.

When it is known that a patient has a MRSA infection, several additional precautions may be taken:

- Health care workers may wear a gown when working with you.
- If you are an inpatient or day patient, you may be isolated in a room by yourself.
- Some pediatric patients with MRSA infections are not allowed to participate in group activities.

### How can you and your health care team keep hands clean?

Clean hands often, especially before touching the face, before eating and after going to the bathroom. Health care workers are to clean hands before and after contact with every patient. To ensure hands are clean:

- If using soap and water: wet hands, scrub with soap for 15-20 seconds ensuring to cover all surfaces (front, back, between fingers and fingertips), rinse with clean water, dry using a paper towel, and use the paper towel to turn off the faucet.
- If using an alcohol-based hand rub: put product on hands and rub together until the product dries ensuring to cover all surfaces (front, back, between fingers and fingertips).

### What do visitors/family members need to know while at National Jewish Health?

In general, healthy people are at low risk for getting infected with MRSA. Good hand hygiene is recommended for family and visitors before leaving the room of a person infected with MRSA. Visitors who do not live with a patient hospitalized with MRSA may be asked to wear a gown and gloves when entering the room.

### What precautions should be taken at home?

To prevent another MRSA infection and to prevent spreading MRSA to others:

- Take medications as prescribed to you by your health care provider.
- Clean your hands often, especially after any contact with the area of your body where MRSA has been found.
- Caretakers, people living with you and visitors should also clean their hands often.
- Avoid sharing personal items such as towels or razors.
- Wash and dry clothing, bed linens and towels in the warmest temperatures recommended on labels.
- Keep your environment clean by using household cleaners and disinfectants following label instructions.
- Tell your health care providers that you have MRSA.

Note: This information is provided to you as an educational service of LUNG LINE® (1-800-222-LUNG). It is not meant to be a substitute for consulting with your own physician.

©Copyright 2006, 2011, 2016. NATIONAL JEWISH HEALTH. PTE.154