

## How should I take care of myself?

- Clean your hands often, and remind others to clean their hands too.
- Take care of yourself — eat right, exercise, quit smoking and avoid stress.
- Take care of your skin — clean cuts or scrapes with soap and water, then cover with a bandage. Seek medical care if you notice any redness, swelling, pain or pus.
- Tell all health care providers that you have had MRSA.

## When should I contact my health care provider?

You should contact your health care provider if:

- you have any new symptoms, such as fever;
- the infection gets worse;
- your wound is not healing;
- you have any questions.



**REMEMBER** that the best way to prevent spreading any infection is frequent hand washing or the use of alcohol hand gel sanitizer.



*This pamphlet was developed by a panel of infection prevention experts in Southeastern Pennsylvania through the Fight MRSA Alliance. It was adapted from several sources, including The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC); "Living with MRSA", produced by the Washington State Department of Health; and "Learning about MRSA", created by the Minnesota Department of Health.*

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# A MRSA GUIDE FOR RESIDENTS AND FAMILIES



## What is MRSA?

Staphylococcus aureus or “staph” is a germ (bacteria) that lives on the skin and in the nose of healthy people. Occasionally, staph gets into the body and causes infection. Infections are treated with antibiotics; however, some bacteria, including staph, have become resistant to common antibiotics. Staph that is resistant to common antibiotics is known as Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus aureus, or MRSA.

Just like other germs, MRSA can be present on your body and not cause symptoms; this is known as colonization. Infection occurs when germs, such as MRSA, are present and cause symptoms. These infections can range from minor skin infections to serious, life-threatening infections such as pneumonia or blood infections.

Some people are at higher risk for getting a MRSA infection. They include those who have:

- weakened immune systems, such as transplant recipients, cancer patients, and those with HIV disease;
- chronic diseases, such as diabetes, kidney failure, and emphysema;
- a history of I.V. drug use;
- been hospitalized for a long period of time;
- had many medical procedures;
- taken antibiotics for long periods of time.

## How will I know if I have MRSA?

Your health care provider may order samples from your blood, urine, wound, or other body site for laboratory testing if you show signs of an infection. If you don't have an active infection, you may be screened before or during your admission,

using a nasal swab, to see whether you are colonized with MRSA.

## How is MRSA treated?

Most residents with MRSA colonization do not need treatment. Depending on your condition, your health care provider may prescribe an ointment for your nose or give you a special soap for your skin.

If you have a MRSA infection, your health care provider will treat you with an antibiotic that is effective against your infection. The antibiotic must be taken as prescribed, even if you begin feeling better. If you have a wound, your health care provider may also drain it.

## Will I always have MRSA?

Over time, your normal skin organisms may take the place of MRSA, but this can vary from person to person. Check with your healthcare provider if you have questions about MRSA recurring.

## What will this mean for my nursing home stay?

Nursing home staff practice standard infection control for all residents. This includes hand washing/sanitizing and the use of protective equipment such as gloves when necessary. If it is determined by the staff that additional precautions are needed to prevent the spread of MRSA, you may need to be placed in a private room or share a room with another resident with MRSA for a period of time. The staff may need to wear gloves and gowns at all times while taking care of you. This is known as Contact Precautions. Visitors will be instructed to report to the nurse's station for directions on what to do when they enter your room.

## What should I do when I leave the nursing home?

You can have close contact with family and friends. Just remember these basic tips to keep MRSA from spreading to others:

- **Clean your hands often.** You, your family, and others in close contact should clean their hands often with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Make sure you have your own hand towel to dry your hands.
- **Cover your wound.** Keep wounds covered with a clean, dry bandage, especially those that are draining. Follow your health care provider's wound care instructions closely, and change bandages when they become soiled. After you remove soiled bandages, place them in a plastic bag and discard them in your regular household trash.
- **Do not share personal items.** Avoid sharing personal items such as towels, washcloths, razors or clothing.
- **Intimate contact.** Shower before any intimate contact.
- **Doing your laundry.** Hold dirty laundry away from your body. Wash your laundry with warm or hot water and use bleach when possible. Dry laundry in a warm or hot dryer and make sure clothes dry completely. Wash your hands after handling dirty laundry and before handling clean laundry.
- **Cleaning your house.** Use a household disinfectant to clean all household surfaces that you touch regularly, daily. Pay special attention to doorknobs, phones, and light switches. Wipe the surface with the disinfectant and then let it dry.