

# MRSA – Methicillin Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*

## Consumer information

### What is MRSA?

MRSA is short for **M**ethicillin **R**esistant *S*taphylococcus *A*ureus. This organism is a bacteria, belonging to the group of bacteria called staphylococci.

Staphylococci often live on our skin and in our nose without causing any harm. When it does cause harm, it can be treated with antibiotics if necessary.

The difference with MRSA is that it is resistant to some antibiotics and is therefore harder to treat.

### Where did I get MRSA?

You may have got MRSA before you came into hospital or you may have picked it up in hospital.

### Carrying MRSA?

You can have MRSA on your skin or in your nose without knowing or being harmed by it, or having any symptoms.

Carrying the bacteria without having an infection is called being 'colonised' with MRSA.

If doctors need to find out if a person is colonised with MRSA they will collect a swab from the nose, throat and groin. Specimens from other body sites may also be collected.

If you are colonised with MRSA, your doctor may recommend a 'clearance' regimen. This may include an antimicrobial cream to put in your nose and an antimicrobial body wash.

### Being infected with MRSA

The MRSA bacteria may enter another body site including the bloodstream and cause an infection. MRSA can cause skin infections, like abscesses and boils; wound infections after surgery; pneumonia, if the bacteria get into the lungs; septicaemia, if the bacteria get into the blood.

To find out if an infection is caused by MRSA, a doctor or nurse may take a specimen. Test results will help doctors decide how to treat the infection with antibiotics that kill MRSA.

### How does MRSA spread to others?

The most important way MRSA spreads is through direct skin contact and by hands. For example, if you are colonised with MRSA, the bacteria may get on surfaces around you. When someone touches those surfaces, the MRSA can get on their hands and then be spread to other people.

## Will having MRSA affect my hospital stay?

If you have MRSA, it's important for staff to stop it spreading to other patients.

They do this by:

- caring for you in a single room
- cleaning their hands after touching you or your surroundings
- wearing gloves and gowns/aprons when they come into your room, and removing them when they leave your room.

It's very important for you to help stop MRSA spreading too.

Wash your hands with soap and running water:

- before handling food or drinks
- after going to the toilet
- after handling dirty washing
- when leaving your room.

Follow instructions from your nurse or doctor.

## Can I have visitors while I am in hospital?

There are usually no restrictions on visitors but please check with the nursing staff if you or your visitors have any concerns.

Your visitors, including children, must wash their hands or use alcohol-based hand rub **every** time they leave your hospital room, so they do not spread MRSA to themselves or other patients. This is the most important way to prevent the spread of all germs.

Staff may also instruct your visitors to wear gloves and/or gowns/aprons while visiting you.

## What about when I go home?

Continuing to clean your hands is one of the most important ways of preventing the spread of infections.

## Further questions?

Please ask your doctor or nurse if you have any more questions about MRSA.



Public Health Services

GPO Box 125

Hobart 7001 Tasmania

[www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/tipcu](http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/tipcu)

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This information has been reviewed by Tasmanian consumers.