



If you are a visitor or a carer

There are a range of actions visitors and carers can take to minimise the risk of giving a patient an infection or catching an infection from healthcare facilities. For example:

- Do not visit someone in a healthcare facility if you feel unwell, have a cold, have been vomiting or have had diarrhea recently. Wait until you feel better.
- Practice good hand hygiene by washing your hands well with soap and water or alcohol-based hand rub:
 - after entering a healthcare facility and when you leave the facility
 - before touching a patient or their food
 - after you leave a patient's room.
- Be careful not to touch dressings, drips or other equipment around the hospital bed.
- Avoid bringing a large number of visitors at one time to visit someone. Always check visiting arrangements with the healthcare workers.
- Do not use the patient's toilet or bathroom, use the visitor facilities.
- You may be asked to wear gloves and an apron or gown when visiting a patient in a healthcare facility. Follow instructions provided by healthcare workers about any extra precautions that may be needed.

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

Do you need to do anything different when you go home?

If you have wounds or sores, it is important to keep them covered with a waterproof dressing, especially overnight.

Do not share grooming items such as nail scissors, tweezers, razors and toothbrushes with other people. All eating utensils, dishes and other crockery can be washed as normal.

Do not share towels or clothes with other people. Change clothing, linen and towels regularly and wash these items as you would normally.

Your healthcare worker will let you know if anything else is required before you are discharged.

How can I find out more about MRSA?

You, your family or your carer can get further information about MRSA from your healthcare worker or from the resources listed below

For more information:

The information in this brochure is based on the *Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infection in Healthcare*.

For further information visit:

www.nhmrc.gov.au

www.safetyandquality.gov.au

Contact:

National Health and Medical Research Council
GPO Box 1421, Canberra ACT 2601

P: 13 000 NHMRC (13 000 64672)

P: +61 2 6217 9000 for international callers.

Please let us know if you need an interpreter.

E: nhmrc@nhmrc.gov.au

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Australian Government

National Health and Medical Research Council

Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care

Methicillin Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* Healthcare-Associated Infections Information for patients



AUSTRALIAN COMMISSION
ON SAFETY AND QUALITY IN HEALTH CARE

What is Methicillin Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*?

Methicillin Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) is a bacteria that lives on the skin or in the nose. In most cases the bacteria does not cause any harm. The term used to describe this is 'colonisation'. However, MRSA can occasionally cause serious health problems when it transfers into some parts of the body.

MRSA can cause skin infections, such as abscesses and boils, and can infect existing wounds. Sometimes MRSA may spread into the bloodstream and cause serious infections, such as sepsis.

Who is at risk of a MRSA infection?

Anyone can become infected with a MRSA infection, but people who have an increased risk of getting a MRSA infection are those who:

- have other chronic health conditions, including diabetes, dermatitis, chronic wounds or whose immune systems are immature or weakened
- have been treated with antibiotics, and have been in a healthcare facility or a nursing home
- regularly have medical equipment entering their body, such as catheters and feeding tubes
- spend time in crowded living conditions or in environments where frequent direct physical (skin to skin) contact may occur.

How does MRSA spread?

In healthcare facilities, MRSA may be passed from person to person by the hands of healthcare workers and caregivers after they have come in contact with other people who are colonised or infected with MRSA. It can also be spread directly to people if they have touched surfaces that are contaminated with MRSA.

Why are you being screened or tested for MRSA?

Healthcare workers may want to test you to see if you are carrying MRSA so that they can protect you from MRSA infection (especially if you are going to have surgery) and provide the right treatment if you do develop a MRSA infection. This will also help the healthcare workers to protect other patients, especially those having surgical procedures where MRSA may cause serious infections.

There may be a policy in place in your healthcare facility to routinely take a sample or swab from patients who are at risk of having MRSA.

How is MRSA infection diagnosed?

A swab from your nose, throat, groin, any wounds or sputum (spit) may be sent to a laboratory for testing. In some states and territories, MRSA is a notifiable condition. This means that doctors, healthcare facilities and laboratories must confidentially inform the Public Health Unit of your diagnosis.

What if you have MRSA and no infection?

If you are colonised with MRSA, meaning that you do not have an infection but the organism is living harmlessly on or in your body, you will not usually require a longer stay in a healthcare facility.

However, it is good to be aware that colonisation of MRSA can continue for prolonged periods of time and it is important to advise your healthcare workers if you are going to be treated in or admitted to another healthcare facility.

If you are colonised with MRSA and require surgery, your doctor may prescribe treatment to reduce the amount of bacteria on your skin. This may include using an antibiotic nasal ointment and washing yourself with an antimicrobial soap.

How is a MRSA infection treated?

If you have an infection caused by MRSA, you may be treated with antibiotics. Serious MRSA infections, such as bloodstream infections and sepsis, require admission to a healthcare facility and treatment with intravenous antibiotics.

Many of the common skin infections caused by MRSA will heal with appropriate wound care alone and may not require treatment with antibiotics.

What will happen when you are in a healthcare facility?

If you have a MRSA infection and are in a healthcare facility or aged care home, healthcare workers will use extra precautions to minimise the risk of spreading MRSA to other people. This might include placing you in a single room and using personal protective equipment (PPE) gloves and an apron or gowns while caring for you. To reduce the risk of spreading MRSA to other people, you may be asked to stay in your room, unless receiving tests and treatment, and avoid common areas, such as the cafeteria and gift shop.

What can you do to help prevent the spread of MRSA?

Effective hand hygiene is the single most effective action to reduce healthcare-associated infections, such as MRSA. This involves applying an alcohol-based handrub to the surface of hands (including liquids, gels and foams) or washing hands with the use of a water and soap or a soap solution, either non-antimicrobial or antimicrobial. This needs to be completed frequently and thoroughly to reduce risk of spreading bacteria. It is particularly important that you perform hand hygiene after going to the toilet or coming into contact with an MRSA affected area (avoid touching wherever possible).