



What You Need to Know about Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA): *A Fact Sheet for Patients and Their Family Members*

Staph (short for “staphylococcus”) is a type of bacteria that lives on our skin. Most of the time, staph is not a problem. However, it sometimes can cause an infection that is serious. MRSA (methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*) is a type of staph infection resistant to methicillin and some other antibiotics. This makes it difficult to treat.

When a patient in the hospital has an MRSA infection, precautions are taken to prevent MRSA from being spread to other patients.

Steps to prevent the spread of MRSA:

Doctors and hospital staff can help prevent the spread of MRSA in five ways:

1. **Using proper hand hygiene:** Everyone who touches the patient should always wash their hands with soap and water or an alcohol cleanser before and after contact. They also should wash their hands after touching anything in the room such as a patient’s bed or medical supplies. Proper hand hygiene is needed for contact with all patients, not just those with MRSA.
2. **Cleaning patient rooms and supplies:** Everything in the patient’s room needs to be cleaned regularly and properly, with correct disinfectants. This helps prevent MRSA (or other bacteria) from getting on people’s hands and clothes.
3. **Screening cultures:** Some people have MRSA on their bodies, but it is not causing an infection (colonization). A “screening culture” or “surveillance culture” can test for this. This is done by taking a swab from the patient’s nose or other body area. Some hospitals test only patients who are at high risk, such as those in intensive care where an MRSA infection can be very serious.

4. **Using contact precautions:** All doctors and hospital staff in contact with patients who have MRSA infections must wear gloves and a gown. This is called “contact precautions.” These precautions are needed even if staff only touch the patient’s bed or other items in the room. In some hospitals, contact precautions are also used with patients colonized with MRSA.
5. **Using “bundles of care” with high-risk items:** Patients in intensive care may have a central line (a catheter or “line” placed in a large vein) or a ventilator (respirator). While these are helpful, they can also lead to infections, including MRSA. Hospitals can prevent these types of infections by using a bundle of “care steps.”

For more information about central lines, ventilators, and bundles, please see the patient and family fact sheets included with the first six Campaign interventions at:

<http://www.ihl.org/NR/rdonlyres/87DD8411-7DC1-4878-9C7B-F3923CF01F63/0/PatientsandFamiliesAllSix5Million.pdf>

How patients and family members can help:

- **Watch to make sure that hospital staff wash their hands before and after working with the patient.** Do not be afraid to remind them to wash their hands!
- **If you or your family member has an MRSA infection, make sure that everyone in the hospital wears a gown and gloves.** Again, please say something if this does not happen.
- **Always use proper hand hygiene.** This means washing your hands when you are at home, the gym, school... everywhere!

Learn more about MRSA infections as they relate to the 5 Million Lives Campaign at www.ihl.org.

The 5 Million Lives Campaign is an initiative to protect patients from five million incidents of medical harm over the next two years (December 2006 – December 2008).

<http://www.ihl.org/IHI/Programs/Campaign/Campaign.htm>

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