

Meticillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* MRSA

Staphylococcus aureus (often shortened to “Staph”, “Staph aureus” or *S. aureus*) is a type of bacteria (germ) which lives harmlessly on the skin and in the noses, in about one third of people.

Most strains of *S. aureus* are sensitive to the more commonly used antibiotics, and infections can be effectively treated. Some *S. aureus* bacteria are more resistant.

Those resistant to the antibiotic meticillin are termed meticillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) and often require different types of antibiotic to treat them.

Symptoms of MRSA

Having MRSA on your skin doesn't cause any symptoms and doesn't make you ill. You won't usually know if you have it unless you have a screening test before going into hospital.

If MRSA gets deeper into your skin, it can cause:

- redness
- swelling
- warmth
- pain
- pus

If it gets further into your body, it can cause more serious infections, like blood poisoning and toxic shock syndrome where it gets into the bloodstream. These are much less common than skin infections.

What is MRSA bacteraemia?

The word bacteraemia means the presence of bacteria in the bloodstream. A bloodstream infection can sometimes be referred to as septicaemia or blood poisoning. The cause of a bloodstream infection can be tested for by the microbiology lab using blood cultures.

When MRSA is found in the blood cultures, then a person is diagnosed with an MRSA bacteraemia.

How you get MRSA

MRSA lives harmlessly on the skin of around 1 in 30 people – usually in the nose, armpits, groin or buttocks. This is known as "colonisation" or "carrying" MRSA. They usually only cause an infection if they get into the skin or deeper into your body – for example, through a bite, cuts, surgical wounds or drip catheter etc.

You can get MRSA on your skin by:

- touching someone who has it
- sharing things like towels, sheets and clothes with someone who has MRSA on their skin
- touching surfaces or objects that have MRSA on them

Getting MRSA on your skin won't make you ill, and it may go away in a few hours, days, weeks or months without you noticing. But it could cause an infection if it gets deeper into your body.

Preventing MRSA

If you're staying in hospital, there are some simple things you can do to reduce your risk of getting or spreading MRSA.

You should:

- wash your hands often (hand wipes and alcohol hand gel are also effective) – especially before and after eating and after going to the toilet
- follow the advice you're given about wound care and looking after devices that could lead to infection (such as urinary catheters or drips)
- report any unclean facilities to staff – don't be afraid to talk to staff if you're concerned about hygiene

If you're visiting someone in hospital, clean your hands before and after entering the ward and before touching the person. Gel or wipes are often placed by patients' beds and at the entrance to wards.

It's also a good idea to put a dressing over any breaks in your skin, such as sores or cuts, to stop MRSA getting into your body.

Click to download the MRSA leaflet:

https://www.niinfectioncontrolmanual.net/sites/default/files/MRSA_Leaflet_04_16.pdf