Living with MRSA & other Resistant Organisms (MDROs)

MDRO’s are defined as microorganisms, mostly bacteria, that are resistant to antibiotics.
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WHAT IS MRSA & WHY IS IT SERIOUS?

Some germs that commonly live on your skin are called staphylococcus or “staph” bacteria. Usually they cause no harm but occasionally get inside the body thru a break in the skin and cause infection. These infections are treated with antibiotics. When commonly used antibiotics no longer kill the bacteria, it means they have become resistant. This type of bacteria is called MRSA.

Anyone can get MRSA. Infections range from mild to life threatening. MRSA is contagious and can be spread thru skin to skin contact. If one person in a family has MRSA, the rest of the family may get it.

MRSA is no longer a “hospital” infection. In the 1990’s, a new type of MRSA was identified among children and adults who have no medical problems and have never been hospitalized.

WHAT DOES MRSA LOOK LIKE?

Most often, MRSA causes skin infections which may look like spider bites, red painful bumps, blisters filled with fluid or a cut that is swollen, hot & filled with pus.

It is also possible to have MRSA in other areas of the body such as the blood, lungs, eyes and urine. These are usually more serious but less common.
HOW DID I GET MRSA

Anyone can get MRSA. You can get MRSA the same way you can get a cold, such as by touching someone or something that has the bacteria on it and then touching your eyes or your nose. Washing your hands often reduces your chances of getting MRSA.

MRSA can live on surfaces and objects for month. However, it can be killed thru proper cleaning with a disinfectant.

Some ways that you could get MRSA:
⇒ Touching the infected skin of someone who has MRSA
⇒ Using personal items of someone who has MRSA, such as towels, wash cloths, clothes or athletic equipment.
⇒ Touching objects, such as public phones or doorknobs, that have MRSA bacteria on the surface
⇒ Being in crowded places where germs are easily spread, such as hospitals, nursing homes, daycares or college dorms

You may increase your chances of getting MRSA if:
⇒ You take antibiotics a lot
⇒ You take antibiotics without a prescription
⇒ You don’t follow directions when taking antibiotics, such as stopping early or missing doses

You are at greater risk of getting MRSA if you are recovering from surgery, have tubes in your body for medical treatment or if you share needles.
There are two ways you can have MRSA:

You can have an active infection.

An active infection means you have symptoms. The types of symptoms depend on where the bacteria are located. Usually an active infection is a skin infection, such as a boil, a sore, or an infected cut.

You can be a carrier.

If you are a carrier you do not have symptoms that you can see, but you still have MRSA bacteria living on your skin and in your nose. If you are a carrier, your provider may say that you are colonized.

Carrier and colonized mean the same thing.

**WILL I ALWAYS HAVE MRSA?**

**Maybe.** Many people who have active infections are treated and no longer have MRSA. However, sometimes MRSA goes away after treatment and comes back several times. If MRSA infections keep coming back again and again, your health care provider can help you sort out the reasons you keep getting them.

Even if active infections go away, you can still have MRSA bacteria on your skin and in your nose. This means you are now a carrier of MRSA. You may not get sick or have any more skin infections, but you can spread MRSA to others. It is not fully understood why some people carry MRSA but don’t get infections.
HOW CONTAGIOUS AM I?

If you have an active MRSA infection on your skin, it is contagious. If someone touches your infection or something that came in contact with it, they could get MRSA.

If you are a carrier, then MRSA still lives on your skin or in your nose. If you don’t wash your hands properly, then you could give the bacteria to others who are close to you, including your pets.

Hand washing prevents the transmission of bacteria.

IS THERE A TEST FOR MRSA?

If you have an active infection, your doctor may take a sample of the fluid. This is called a culture. A culture of the inside of your nose may be taken to see if you are a carrier.

IF I HAVE MRSA, DO I NEED TO DO ANYTHING SPECIAL WHEN I GO TO THE HOSPITAL OR CLINIC?

If you have ever had an active MRSA infection, or you are a carrier, tell your health care providers. They may wear gloves and gowns when treating you to prevent bacteria from getting on their clothes and being transmitted to someone else they are treating. If you are coughing, they may ask you to wear a mask.

Visitors should wear gloves when coming in contact with you in the hospital or wash their hands on exiting your room.
**HOW IS MRSA TREATED?**

MRSA should always be treated by a health care professional.

If you are a carrier, your doctor may do nothing, because the bacteria may go away without treatment. They might also decide to reduce the amount of bacteria on your skin. If you have an active infection, they may drain the infection, give you antibiotics and/or reduce the amount of bacteria on your skin. If they drain the infection, you should keep it covered until it heals. You may be asked to return for a wound check. If you are given antibiotics, you should take them exactly as prescribed and not stop them early because you feel better.

If your health care provider decides to help you reduce the amount of bacteria on your skin, he/she may have you shower with antibacterial soap daily, prescribe antibiotics or prescribe an antibiotic ointment to put in your nose.

**WHEN SHOULD I SEEK MEDICAL CARE?**

You should see your doctor if the infection is not getting better, gets worse or comes back once it is gone.
DOES IT MATTER HOW I WASH MY HANDS?

Good hand hygiene reduces the amount of bacteria on your skin. It is the number one way to prevent the spread of infection.

Wash your hands:
⇒ before preparing food, eating or drinking
⇒ before touching your eyes, nose, mouth, sores, acne, boils or rashes
⇒ before and after changing bandages
⇒ before and after smoking
⇒ before and after blowing your nose
⇒ after touching urine, feces and other body fluids or items soiled with these
⇒ after cleaning the bathroom, changing your bedding and doing laundry
⇒ after going to the bathroom
⇒ after coughing or sneezing
⇒ after touching things that other touch such as doorknobs, phones, shopping carts, etc.

Wet your hands first under warm running water. Apply soap and rub together for at least 30 seconds, getting between the fingers and around the nails. Rinse with warm running water. Dry with a paper towel or hand towel. Turn the faucet off using the towel. Throw the towel in the trash. If you are using a hand towel, do not share with others.
DO I NEED TO BE CAREFUL WHEN I DO LAUNDRY?

MRSA can spread from dirty clothes and bedding. When doing laundry, you will want to follow some precautions:

⇒ Change towels and linens daily
⇒ Have a separate, solid plastic container, for the family member with the MRSA infection
⇒ Handle laundry that comes in contact with the infection separately from other household laundry
⇒ When collecting dirty laundry, hold it away from your body to prevent getting bacteria on your clothes
⇒ Wear disposable gloves to handle laundry that is soiled with body fluids
⇒ Put the laundry in the washer immediately, or store in a plastic bag until it can be washed
⇒ Wash with hot water and regular detergent- use bleach when possible.
⇒ Dry on hot setting. Wash hands after touching dirty laundry and before handling clean laundry, even if you have been wearing gloves.
⇒ Throw gloves away after taking them off, and do no reuse them

Clean your sheets and towels regularly
Change your clothes daily
Do not put clothes you have worn back in the closet or drawers until they have been washed
HOW DO I CLEAN MY HOUSE?

Use a disinfectant to regularly clean surfaces. Pay attention to items that are frequently touched such as light switches, door knobs, phones, toilets, sinks, tubs, faucets, counters, computer keyboards, etc.

Use any household cleaner that you can buy at the grocery store that has the word “disinfectant” on the label and follow the directions. You can make your own bleach solution by mixing one tablespoon of bleach in a quart of water in a spray bottle. Make it fresh daily. Never mix bleach with other cleaners, especially ammonia.

Clean bathrooms frequently. Wipe surfaces starting with the cleanest area moving towards the dirtiest area. Let the surfaces air dry. This will allow enough contact time with the cleaning product to kill the bacteria.

HOW DO I CHANGE MY BANDAGES?

Changing dressings will require the following steps:
Wash hands with soap and water
Put on disposable gloves
Remove the old dressing
Put the old dressing in a plastic bag
Take off the gloves, and put them in the plastic bag, too
Wash and dry your hands
Put on a new, clean pair of disposable gloves
Apply the new dressing. If sore is leaking, extra dressings will be required to keep drainage in
Take off the second pair of gloves & put them into the plastic bag. Seal & throw away in your regular trash
Wash and dry your hands
PERSONAL CARE SUGGESTIONS

⇒ Wash your hands frequently
⇒ Carry alcohol-based hand gel with you so you can sanitize your hands if soap and water are not available
⇒ Cover your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw this tissue in a wastebasket and wash your hands
⇒ Take a bath or shower every day. This will help reduce the amount of bacteria on your skin
⇒ Keep your fingernails short to keep the bacteria from growing under and on your nails
⇒ Change your sheets and towels regularly
⇒ Change your clothes daily and wash them before wearing again
⇒ Do not share towels, razors, toothbrushes, or other personal items
⇒ Take good care of your skin. Remember, MRSA lives on your skin. Any break or crack in your skin can allow it to enter and cause an infection. If you get a cut or scrape, clean it with soap and water and then cover it with a bandage.
⇒ Take care of yourself: eat right, exercise, quit smoking and avoid stress
⇒ Get medical care at first sight of infection in a cut, such as redness, swelling, pain or pus
⇒ Tell your healthcare provider that you have had MRSA in the past

If you work in a healthcare setting, you may need to take special precautions. Consult with your employer.
HOW DO I STOP MRSA FROM SPREADING WHEN I HAVE AN ACTIVE INFECTION

⇒ Follow the personal care guidelines
⇒ Do not poke or squeeze sores
⇒ Do not touch sores. If you touch sores, wash your hands immediately
⇒ Cover sores with a bandage
⇒ If you have a leaky dressing, put extra bandages on to keep the fluid contained
⇒ Wear clothes that cover the bandages if possible
⇒ Be especially careful around people who have weak immune systems such as newborn babies, the elderly & those with chronic illnesses.
⇒ Be careful around people who have eczema or someone who has just had surgery. They are more likely to get an infection.
⇒ If MRSA is in your urine or feces, be sure to clean your bathroom well
⇒ Do not participate in contact sports until your sores have healed.
⇒ Do not go to a public gym, sauna, hot tub or pool until all sores have healed
⇒ Do no get a manicure, massage or haircuts until sores have healed

HOW DO I STOP MRSA FROM SPREADING WHEN I AM A CARRIER

⇒ Follow the personal care guidelines
⇒ If you go to the gym, disinfect all equipment after using
⇒ Shower well with soap before & after using the pool, hot tub or sauna
⇒ Shower immediately after participating in sports or working out in a gym
⇒ Shower before any intimate skin to skin contact with another person
CHILDERN & MRSA

If you have MRSA and there are children in your life, you can still interact with them.

Washing your hands and preventing children from coming in contact with your infections are the best ways to avoid spreading MRSA. Closely follow the “Personal Care Guideline” especially when children are present. Make children wash their hands, too.

PETS & MRSA

Pets, such as dogs and cats, can also get MRSA. Pets can have active infections or they can be carriers. If you keep getting MRSA infections, or if you see any signs of a skin infection on your pet, talk with your vet about testing your pet. Pets with MRSA can be treated. You do not need to get rid of your pet.

OTHER MULTIDRUG RESISTANT BACTERIA

MRSA is just one of a number of bacteria that are becoming resistant to common antibiotics. You may have been told that you have VRE, ESBL or C diff. Collectively, they are known as MDROs or multidrug resistant organisms. Because you care for yourself the same way as with MRSA, they are covered here in this booklet as well.
**VRE**  
Vancomycin-Resistant Enterococci

**ESBL**  
Extended Spectrum Beta Lactamase

VRE/ESBL can be spread or transmitted to other people through touch. VRE/ESBL is a very hardy bacterium. It can survive on regular surfaces for 5 to 7 days and on hands for several hours. It is easy to kill with proper use of disinfectants and good hand washing. This bacterium does not travel through the air.

How can I prevent VRE/ESBL from spreading at home?

You can prevent the spread of VRE & ESBL, by following the same guidelines used for the prevention of MRSA as outlined in this booklet.

⇒ Regular hand washing by patients and family is the simplest and most effective way

⇒ VRE are no more dangerous than the other bacteria normally found in people we interact with everyday

⇒ Bedrooms and bathrooms should be cleaned with disinfectant. Bleach may be used (1 part bleach to 9 parts water)

⇒ The most common objects and surfaces that are contaminated include toilets, grip bars, flushing handles, doorknobs, light switches, bedside tables and telephones, these should be cleaned frequently.

⇒ Soiled bandages must be thrown out in a closed plastic bag

⇒ Clothes belonging to the person with VRE can be washed with laundry detergent in hot water
CLOSTRIDIUM DIFFICILE

Clostridium difficile or “C diff”, is a bacterium that causes watery diarrhea and intestinal conditions.

Symptoms of C. difficile include:

- Watery diarrhea (at least three bowel movements per day or two or more days)
- Fever
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Abdominal pain/tenderness

How can I prevent C. diff from spreading at home?

- When someone in the household has diarrhea caused by a C. diff infection, the most effective and simplest method to prevent its transmission is for the patient and family members to wash their hands frequently.
- Bleach solution or a disinfectant is good to clean with.
- Alcohol gel products are not as effective as soap and water to get rid of C. diff.
- Only take antibiotics as prescribed by your doctor.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT ANYTHING PRESENTED IN THIS BOOKLET, FEEL FREE TO ASK YOUR DOCTOR, NURSE OR ONE OF THE INFECTION PREVENTIONISTS. WE HOPE THE INFORMATION PROVIDED IN THIS BOOKLET WILL HELP YOU LIVE SAFELY.