

Living with MRSA

Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*



In partnership with Pierce County
Antimicrobial Resistance Task Force

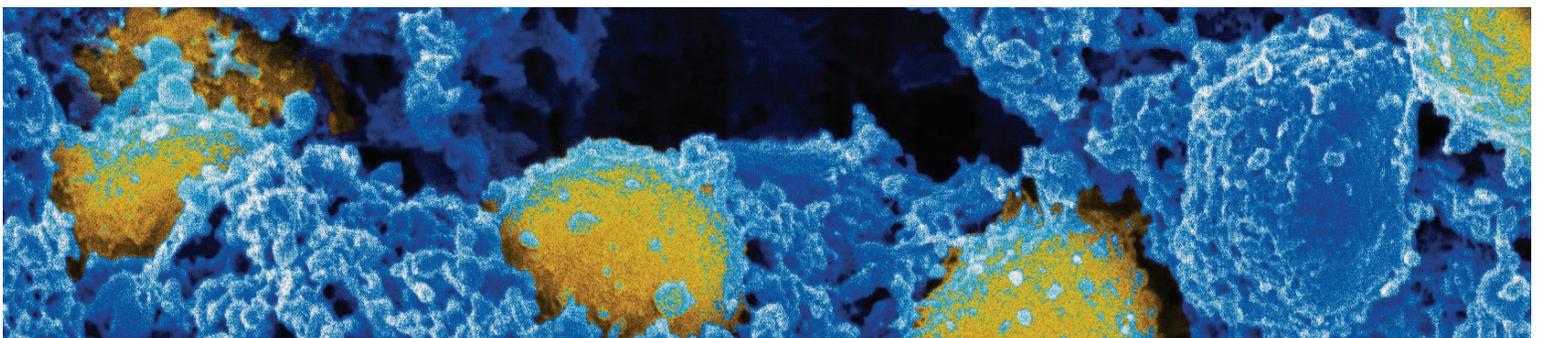


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What is MRSA?

Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) is a type of bacteria that is resistant to (not killed by) common antibiotics.

MRSA bacteria are often found in the nose and on the skin and cause no harm. But if bacteria enter the body through surgical or other wounds, burns or tubes implanted for medical treatment, they can cause skin infections and serious illness. MRSA infections are becoming more common among children and people who don't have medical problems.

How is MRSA treated?

Apply an antibiotic cream to the wound and cover it with a bandage. If it doesn't seem to be healing or gets worse, call a healthcare provider. Don't drain, pop, lance or cut open a wound. The liquid or pus leaking from a wound is full of bacteria that can move further into your body when drained incorrectly.

Even though MRSA isn't killed by common antibiotics, some antibiotics can cure most MRSA infections. If a healthcare provider prescribes medication for you, take it exactly as directed. Don't stop early. Take all the medicine until it's gone. The last few doses kill the toughest germs.



Know the Signs

Most MRSA infections look like a bump or infected area on the skin that may be:

- Red.
- Swollen.
- Painful.
- Warm to the touch.
- Full of liquid or pus.
- Accompanied by a fever.

MRSA bacteria can cause skin conditions like:

- Infected cuts or hair follicles.
- Boils.
- Fluid-filled blisters.
- Sores that look like insect or spider bites.

Minor MRSA infections can become more serious problems, like:

- Tissue infections.
- Abscesses.
- Blood, bone or heart infections.

Protect Others from MRSA

How is MRSA spread?

MRSA can spread from an infected person to someone else:

- By touching a MRSA-infected wound or liquid or pus leaking from it.
- By touching things, like towels or sheets, a person with MRSA has used.
- In healthcare settings, like hospitals or nursing homes.

MRSA is almost always spread through physical contact, not through the air.

How contagious is MRSA?

It depends on where MRSA bacteria are on or in your body.

MRSA on your skin

Pus or fluid leaking from a MRSA-infected wound contains bacteria. If it gets on someone else, her or she could get a MRSA infection. If it gets on your hands and you touch someone else, you could pass bacteria to them.

MRSA in your lungs

If you have MRSA in your lungs, you can send tiny droplets of fluid into the air when you cough. These droplets can spread MRSA to others. If you have MRSA in your lungs, wear a mask when leaving

home or when around susceptible people. Cover your mouth with a tissue when you cough. Throw the tissue in the trash and immediately wash your hands.

MRSA in your nose

If you have MRSA in your nose you can do your normal activities. Wash your hands often, especially after touching your nose.

Even after an infection has gotten better and you have no symptoms, bacteria can still be in your nose or on warm, moist areas of your skin. The risk is low but you can still spread MRSA to others, especially if you touch your nose then touch someone else.



Never share towels. Use a special hand towel. Mark it or keep it in a separate place so others won't use it.

How to prevent giving MRSA to others

Wash your hands often. If you don't have soap and water, use a hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol to kill MRSA bacteria (see page 4).

If you have a skin infection, keep the area covered with dry bandages and clothes (if possible). Shower or bathe every day.

Never share razors, toothbrushes, towels or other personal items with others.

If MRSA is in your urine, thoroughly clean your bathroom. If other people clean your urine, they should wear disposable gloves and wash their hands afterward. Carefully handle and immediately wash clothes or bedding with urine on it (see page 6).

People with MRSA should be especially careful around people with weak immune systems, like newborn babies, elderly people and people with a chronic disease, skin condition or recent surgery. A MRSA infection can make these people very sick.

Important

Never share razors, toothbrushes, towels or other personal items with others.

How to Change a Bandage on a MRSA Wound

Change bandages regularly, especially if they get wet from water or liquid or pus leaking from the wound.

1. Wash your hands with soap and water.
2. Put on a pair of clean disposable gloves. (You can buy disposable gloves at most pharmacies.)
3. Remove the old bandage and put it in a plastic bag.
4. Take off your gloves and put them into the same plastic bag.
5. Wash your hands with soap and water.
6. Put on a new pair of clean disposable gloves.
7. Apply the new bandage.
8. Take off your gloves and put them into the same plastic bag.
9. Tie the plastic bag shut and throw it in the trash.
10. Wash your hands with soap and water.

When to wash your hands

Everyone—not just people with MRSA—should wash their hands at these times.

- Before and after touching wounds, genitals, eyes, nose, mouth or broken skin (like cuts, scrapes, acne, boils or skin rashes).
- After touching poop, body fluids or items with poop or body fluids on them (like bandages, diapers or bedding).
- After cleaning the bathroom, changing bedding or doing laundry.
- After using the bathroom.
- After coughing, sneezing or blowing your nose.
- Before preparing food, eating or drinking.
- Before and after smoking.

How to wash your hands

1. Wet your hands with water.
2. Apply soap to your hands.
3. Rub your hands together. Rub all surfaces of your hands, fingers and thumbs (including under and around jewelry) for at least 15 seconds.
4. Rinse all the soap off your hands.
5. Dry your hands with a paper towel.
6. Use a paper towel to turn off the faucet and open the door.

If you don't have soap and water, use a hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol instead.

The Right Way to Use Hand Sanitizer

1. Apply a thumbnail-size amount of hand sanitizer to the palm of one hand. Rub your hands together.
2. Cover your fingers, thumbs and the surfaces of your hands with the hand sanitizer.
3. Rub your hands together until they're dry.

Some hand sanitizer products, like towelettes or foam, may not be effective. Hand sanitizers must contain at least 60% alcohol to be effective. Read the label before you use it.



Prevent the Spread of MRSA at Home

Clean and disinfect your house well and often

Regularly clean (remove visible dirt) and disinfect (apply a chemical that kills bacteria on) surfaces and other commonly touched areas, like doorknobs, light switches and phones. Clean and disinfect all surfaces with body fluids on them. Clean and disinfect frequently touched items and surfaces daily.

What solution should I use to disinfect?

You can buy disinfectant at most stores. Always read the label and follow the instructions.

A bleach solution is an easy-to-make, inexpensive disinfectant. See the instructions below for how to make it. Never mix bleach with any cleaner containing ammonia.

After cleaning, put washcloths in the laundry and throw paper towels in the trash. Then wash your hands with soap and water.

How to Make Bleach Solution

1. Add 1 tablespoon of bleach to a container.
2. Add 1 quart of water to the container.
3. Mix well.

Make new bleach solution each day. The chemicals become inactive when the solution sits.



Handle waste and trash with care

Put waste like bandages, tissues and gloves in a plastic bag, tie it tightly at the top and throw it in your regular trash. This helps protect others from bacteria.

Take extra care with your laundry

- When picking up dirty clothes, towels or bedding, hold them away from your body. This helps prevent MRSA bacteria getting on you or your clothes.
- Wear disposable gloves when touching dirty clothes, towels or bedding.
- If body fluids (like liquid or pus from a wound) get on clothes, towels or bedding, wash them separately from other laundry.
- If you can't wash dirty clothes, towels or bedding immediately, store them in a plastic bag until you can wash them.
- Use hot water, bleach and detergent to wash laundry.
- Use a hot clothes dryer to dry laundry.
- Clothes, towels and bedding without body fluids on them can be washed with other laundry.



Wear disposable gloves when touching dirty laundry. If body fluids get on clothes, towels or bedding, wash them separately from other laundry.



Use hot water, bleach and detergent to wash laundry. Use a hot clothes dryer to dry laundry.

Prevent the Spread of MRSA in the Community

A person with a wound leaking liquid or pus that keeps soaking through bandages should stay home until the leaking can be contained with a bandage.

How to protect others when you're outside your home

Cover all sores (wounds, blisters, boils) with clean, dry bandages before leaving home. If possible, cover bandages with clothes. If you can't cover sores with bandages (like blisters on your face) don't touch the area. If you accidentally touch sores, immediately wash your hands with soap and water.

Carry hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol with you to clean your hands when soap and water aren't available.

Important

Be especially careful to throw bandages in the trash so they don't touch other people or common surfaces.

Don't work out at a public gym.

Don't play contact sports. Sweating can cause bandages to loosen and lead to skin-to-skin or skin-to-equipment contact, allowing MRSA bacteria to spread.

Don't use a public sauna, hot tub or pool.

Don't get services like haircuts, manicures or massages until your sores have healed.

If you work in a healthcare setting or a place where people might have poor immune systems, take special precautions. Talk with your employer.



Children, adults and athletes with MRSA shouldn't play contact sports. Skin-to-skin or skin-to-equipment contact can spread MRSA bacteria.

MRSA and Your Health

Does MRSA ever go away?

When a person develops MRSA symptoms, the infection is “acute.” Medication can treat many acute MRSA infections. Some people treated for an acute infection continue to have MRSA bacteria in their nose or on their skin for months or years, even without symptoms. A person with MRSA bacteria who is not sick is a “carrier” and their infection is “colonized.” People with chronic wounds, tubes or chronic illnesses are more likely to develop a colonized infection. Healthcare providers sometimes treat people with a colonized infection, but sometimes the bacteria just go away over time.

What to do when an infection is gone

After an infection gets better, MRSA bacteria may still be in the nose and can still spread to others. Continue to frequently wash your hands with soap and water, especially after touching your nose. Cover both your nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough, throw the tissue in the trash and wash your hands with soap and water.

If the infection comes back or if a similar infection shows up later, cover wounds with a bandage and see a healthcare provider as soon as possible. Tell the healthcare provider about your past MRSA infection(s).

What to do about repeated MRSA infections

No one knows why some people have MRSA bacteria and don't get sick. If you have repeated infections, you may want to ask a healthcare provider to test other people you have close (skin-to-skin) contact with. Your pets may have MRSA bacteria and give it back to you. If your close contacts or pets test positive for MRSA, your healthcare provider or veterinarian may decide to treat them so they no longer have the bacteria.

How to stay healthy

Wash your hands with soap and water and use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol to prevent getting or spreading bacteria. If you get a cut or scrape, wash it with soap and water. Cover it with a bandage and keep it clean and dry until it heals. Antibiotic cream may prevent infection in cuts and scrapes, but won't penetrate below the skin into a boil or abscess. See a healthcare provider at the first sign of infection (redness, swelling, pain or pus) in a cut.

When to see a healthcare provider

Call a healthcare provider if:

- You develop signs of infection, like fever, pain, spreading redness, local swelling or heat, or pus or liquid containing blood leaking from a wound. Early treatment can prevent an infection from getting worse.
- New symptoms develop during or after treatment for a skin infection.
- An infection doesn't get better or comes back.

What to expect from a healthcare provider

When you visit a healthcare provider, tell them you have MRSA. They should:

- Wash their hands or use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol before and after caring for you.
- Wear gloves when caring for you.
- Wear a gown to prevent bacteria getting on their clothes.

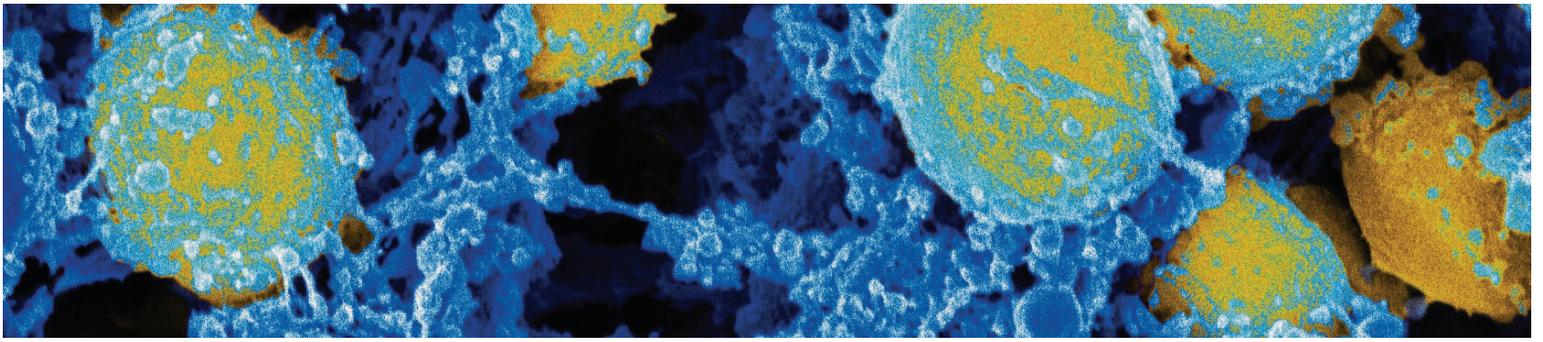
If you are admitted to a hospital, staff will place a “contact precautions” card on your door so healthcare providers will know to use extra protection when caring for you.

These precautions are to protect you and others.

Resources

For more information about MRSA, ask a healthcare provider or visit these websites.

- Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department
www.tpchd.org/mrsa
- Washington State Department of Health
www.doh.wa.gov/youandyourfamily/illnessanddisease/antibioticresistance/mrsa
- United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/mrsa



Tacoma-Pierce County
Health Department
Healthy People in Healthy Communities

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