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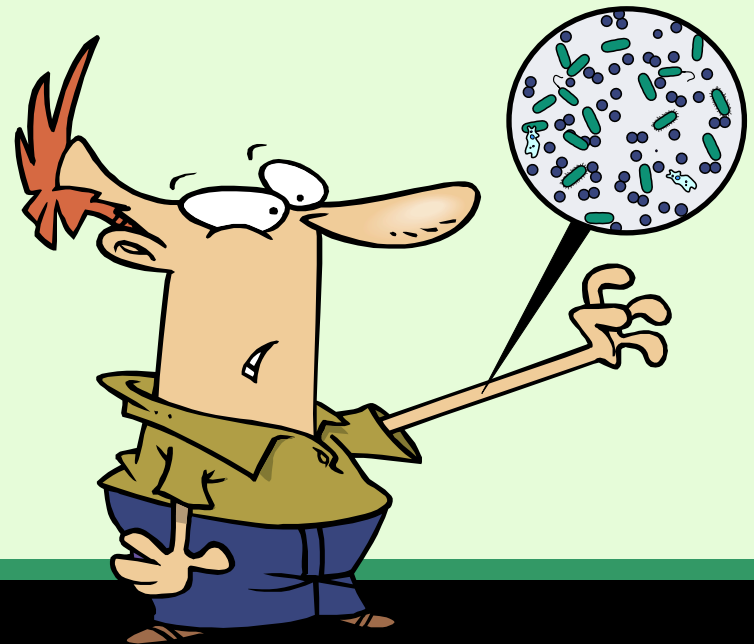
[www.srhd.org](http://www.srhd.org)

For more copies or if you have questions, contact:  
Spokane Regional Health District  
Disease Prevention & Response  
(509) 324-1442 or TDD (509) 324-1464

This booklet uses information from Tacoma Pierce County Health Department and Spokane Regional Health District.

# Living with MRSA

(Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*)



**What is MRSA?**

**Protect Others from Infection**

**Prevent the Spread of MRSA in the Home**

**Prevent the Spread of MRSA in the Community**

**MRSA and your Health**

# What is MRSA?

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

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

## How is MRSA treated?

Some MRSA-infected wounds are treated by simply applying an antibiotic cream (such as Neosporin®) and covering with a bandage. If a skin wound does not seem to be healing or is worsening, contact a doctor. Do not drain a wound at home. The wound is full of bacteria which can move further into the body if not drained correctly.

Even though MRSA is resistant to common antibiotics, there are some which can successfully cure most MRSA infections. If you or someone you are caring for has a MRSA infection and a doctor gives a prescription, make sure the medication is taken exactly as prescribed. Do not stop early, make sure the whole prescription is finished. The last few doses kill the toughest germs.

## Know the signs

What are the signs and symptoms of MRSA? Most MRSA infections appear as a bump or infected area on the skin that may be:

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



Common skin conditions caused by staph and MRSA include:

- Infected cuts or hair follicles
- Boils
- Fluid filled blisters (impetigo)
- Skin sores that may look like insect or spider bites

Minor MRSA infections can sometimes become more serious problems such as:

- Infection of surrounding tissues
- Abscesses
- Blood, bone, or heart infections

# Resources

For more information about MRSA, ask your doctor or visit the websites below.

## Local:

*Spokane Regional Health District*  
<http://www.srhd.org/topics/mrsa.asp>

*Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department*  
<http://www.tpchd.org/page.php?id=12>

## Washington State:

*Washington State Department of Health*  
<http://www.doh.wa.gov/Topics/Antibiotics/MRSA.htm>

## National:

*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*  
[http://www.cdc.gov/mrsa/mrsa\\_initiative/skin\\_infection/](http://www.cdc.gov/mrsa/mrsa_initiative/skin_infection/)  
<http://www.cdc.gov/Features/MRSAInfections/>

## When to seek medical care

- If you develop signs of infection (fever, pain, spreading redness, local swelling or heat, or drainage that contains pus or blood). *Early treatment can prevent the infection from getting worse.*
- If new symptoms develop during or after treatment for a skin infection.
- If the infection does not clear up or comes back.

## What to expect from a doctor or health care worker

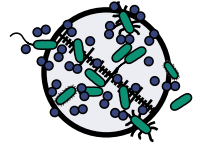
Whenever you visit a health care provider, you should tell them you have MRSA. They should wash their hands or use an alcohol-based hand gel before and after caring for you. They will wear gloves when touching your wound or body fluids, and may wear gloves at all times when caring for you. They may also wear a gown to prevent getting the bacteria onto their clothing.

If you are admitted to a hospital, a “Special Precautions” card will be placed on your hospital room door so that staff will know that they need to use extra precautions while caring for you.

All of these precautions are to protect you and other patients.



## Protect Others from Infection



### How is MRSA spread?

MRSA can spread from an infected person to another person:

- During prolonged skin to skin contact.
- Through contact with a MRSA-infected wound or the drainage from that wound.
- By using or touching commonly shared objects, such as towels or sheets, that an infected person has used.
- In health care settings such as hospitals or nursing homes.

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

### How contagious is MRSA?

This depends on where MRSA bacteria are on or in the body.

- *MRSA on the skin:* Any pus or fluid from a MRSA-infected wound (such as a boil or fluid-filled blister) contains MRSA bacteria and is infectious. If this substance gets onto someone else, they could get a MRSA infection. If it gets onto your hands and you touch another person, you could pass bacteria to them.
- *MRSA in the 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 you should wear a mask when leaving home or when in the company of susceptible people. You should also cover your mouth with a tissue when coughing, then throw the tissue in a wastebasket and wash hands immediately.
- *MRSA in the nose:* If you have MRSA in your nose you can conduct your normal activities but should wash your hands often, especially after touching your nose.

Even after an infection has cleared up and there are no symptoms, contagious bacteria may still be in the nose or other warm, moist areas on the skin. Although the risk is small, MRSA can still spread to others, especially if you touch your nose and then touch someone else.

## How to prevent giving MRSA to other people

The most important thing to do is wash your hands frequently. If you don't have access to soap and water, MRSA or staph germs can be killed by using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

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

If MRSA is in your urine, be sure to thoroughly clean your bathroom. If other people come into contact with the urine they should use disposable gloves and wash their hands well afterwards. Clothing or bedding with urine on it must be handled carefully and washed immediately to avoid transferring the bacteria to others (see page 6).

People who have MRSA should be especially careful around those with weak immune systems, such as newborn babies, elderly persons, and anyone with a chronic disease, skin condition, or recent surgery. If they get a MRSA infection, it can make them very ill.



Taking care of a MRSA wound.

## How to change a bandage on a MRSA wound

You should change bandages regularly, especially if they get wet (either from wound drainage or from water).

- 1) Wash hands well with soap and water before you start
- 2) Put on a clean pair disposable gloves (you can get latex gloves at most pharmacies).
- 3) Remove the old bandage and put into a plastic bag.
- 4) Take off your gloves, and put them into the same plastic bag.
- 5) Wash hands well with soap and water again.
- 6) Put on a new pair of clean disposable gloves.
- 7) Apply new bandage.
- 8) Take off gloves and put them into the plastic bag with the other gloves and bandage.
- 9) Tie the bag shut and throw away in the regular trash.
- 10) Wash and dry your hands again.

## MRSA and Your Health

### Does MRSA ever go away?

When someone develops MRSA symptoms, their condition is referred to as an "acute" infection. Many acute MRSA infections can be treated with medication. However, some people who are treated for an acute infection will continue to carry MRSA bacteria in their nose or on their skin for months or years, even though they have no symptoms. When a person carries the bacteria but is not sick, they are referred to as being "colonized" or as a carrier. People with chronic wounds, tubes, or chronic illnesses are more likely to be colonized. Doctors sometimes treat people who are colonized, but many times those bacteria will just go away over time.

### What to do when an infection is gone

After the infection has cleared up, remember that MRSA bacteria may still be present in the nose and it is still possible to spread to others. Continue frequent handwashing, especially after touching the nose. Cover both the nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing, throw the tissue in a waste basket, and wash hands.

If the infection comes back or if a similar infection shows up later, cover any wound with a bandage and seek medical attention as soon as possible. Tell the doctor about your past MRSA infection(s).

### What to do about repeated MRSA infections

We do not understand why some people carry MRSA and don't get sick. There may be some reason why you are more susceptible. If you have repeated infections, you may want to ask your doctor about testing other people with whom you have frequent close (skin-to-skin) contact. It is possible that pets have become colonized with MRSA and are giving it back to you. If your close contacts or pets test positive for MRSA, your doctor (or vet) may decide to treat them so they no longer carry the bacteria.

### How to stay healthy

Hand washing and use of an alcohol-based hand sanitizer are the primary ways to prevent getting or spreading bacteria. If you get a cut or scrape, wash it well with soap and water, and cover it with a bandage to keep it clean and dry until healed. Antibiotic ointment may help prevent infection in cuts and scrapes. However, ointment will not penetrate below the skin into a boil or abscess. Seek medical care at the first sign of infection (redness, swelling, pain, and pus) in a cut.

# Prevent the Spread of MRSA in the Community

## How to protect others when you are outside the home

A person with a draining wound that keeps soaking through bandages should stay home until the drainage can be completely contained with bandages.

### IMPORTANT:

Be especially careful to keep any discarded bandages from coming in contact with other people or common surface areas.

If an infected person leaves home, they should be sure to:

- Cover all sores (wounds, boils, etc.) with clean, dry bandages before leaving. If possible, keep bandages covered with clothing. If sores cannot be covered with bandages, like impetigo on the face, do not touch the area! If you accidentally touch it, wash your hands immediately.
- Carry alcohol-based hand cleaner to clean hands if soap and water are not available.
- Avoid working out at a public gym. Infected school children and athletes should not participate in contact sports. Sweating can cause bandages to loosen and lead to skin-to-skin or skin-to-equipment contact, allowing MRSA bacteria to spread.
- Avoid using a public sauna, hot tub or pool.
- Avoid personal care services such as haircut, manicure, or massage until your sores have healed.

NOTE: If you work in a health care setting or place where people might have poor immune systems, you may need to take special precautions. Consult with your employer.

## If you have MRSA, wash your hands at the following times:

- BEFORE and AFTER touching wounds, genitals, eyes, nose, or mouth, and broken skin (like cuts and scrapes, acne, boils, and skin rashes).
- AFTER touching stool, body fluids, and items soiled with body fluids, such as bandages, diapers, or bedding.
- AFTER cleaning the bathroom, changing your bedding, and 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:



- Wet hands with water.
- Apply soap to hands.
- Rub hands together. Rub all surfaces of hands, fingers and thumbs, including under and around jewelry, for at least 15 seconds.
- Rinse hands well to remove soap.
- Dry hands with paper towel.
- Use a paper towel to turn off the faucet (remember, your hands were dirty when you turned the faucet on) and to open the door.

NOTE: If you do not have access to soap and water, you can use a waterless, alcohol-based antiseptic hand sanitizer gel instead.

## How to use hand-sanitizing gels\* the right way:

1. Apply a thumbnail-sized amount of gel to the palm of one hand and rub hands together.
2. Make sure to cover all fingers and hand surfaces with the gel.
3. Rub until hands are dry.

\*Some hand-sanitizers, such as towelettes and foam, may not be effective. Read the label before use.

# Prevent the Spread of MRSA in the Home

## Clean and disinfect your house often and well

Regularly clean (remove visible dirt) and disinfect (apply chemical product that kills bacteria) surfaces and other commonly touched areas (doorknobs, light switches, etc.). Clean and disinfect any surface which has come into contact with bodily fluids. Items or surfaces that are touched frequently should be cleaned and disinfected daily.



When disinfecting, the solution should be applied liberally to the surface using a saturated cloth or paper towel. For bacteria to be killed, they must be in contact with wet disinfectant for an extended period of time. Allow the surface to air dry or you can wipe it dry after 10 minutes. Wash cloths in the laundry or dispose of paper towels in the trash after cleaning and disinfecting, and then wash and dry hands.

## What solution should be used to disinfect?

A bleach solution is an easy-to-make, inexpensive disinfectant. Never mix bleach with any cleaners containing ammonia. Other disinfectants are widely available in stores as well. Be sure the label identifies the product as a disinfectant and follow instructions for use.

### BLEACH SOLUTION RECIPE

Mix the following together:

- 1 tablespoon bleach
- 1 quart water

This solution should be made fresh daily because the chemicals become inactive when the solution sits.

## Handle waste and garbage with care

Contaminated waste items, such as bandages, tissues and gloves, should be thrown out in your regular garbage after placing them in a plastic bag and tying the bag tightly. This will help protect others from the germs on these items.

## Take extra care with your laundry

- When picking up dirty linens (towels and bedding) or clothing, hold them away from your body to prevent MRSA from getting onto your clothing. Everyone should wear disposable gloves when touching soiled linen or clothing.
- If linens or clothing are contaminated with body fluids such as wound drainage, wash them separately from all other clothing. If dirty linens cannot be washed immediately, store them in a plastic bag until you can wash them.
- Always use hot water for laundry and bleach if possible. Using a hot clothes dryer can also help kill bacteria.
- Linens and clothing that are not soiled with body fluids can be washed with the other laundry.

### IMPORTANT:

Do not share towels, razors, toothbrushes, or any other personal items with anyone else.



Be sure to separate and wash laundry that has been contaminated with MRSA separately from other laundry.