

MRSA – Information for Patients Who May Be Carriers

Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA) is a special type of Staphylococcus or Staph bacteria that is unaffected by the antibiotic drugs used to treat normal Staph infections. MRSA cannot spread through the air, but it is contagious by contact, either by touching an infected person directly or by touching a surface, like a dirty towel, that has the bacteria on it. Some people can be MRSA carriers without having any visible symptoms of an infection.

MRSA comes in either a hospital or a community form.

MRSA from the hospital: This is the “superbug” that has been in the news lately. It typically infects people who need repeated hospitalizations, surgeries or indwelling medical devices. We rarely see this in our clinic. Treatment usually involves hospitalization.

MRSA from the community: This type is more common, and it is what we see most often in our clinic. Infections usually affect the skin and frequently look like spider bites. Fortunately, this type is much less likely to develop into a serious infection requiring more than home care treatment. However, it can be hard to get rid of with symptoms disappearing and then recurring off and on for weeks or months.

Eradicating MRSA

Unlike a normal Staph infection that can be cured with a course of antibiotic drugs, treatment for an MRSA carrier may take six to eight weeks or longer and involves the following home-care steps:

- Follow your doctor’s instructions for treating any active infections.
- Cover all breaks in the skin. Eczema/rashes need to be well controlled.
- Keep fingernails short to avoid breaking the skin if you do accidentally scratch an infection site.
- Use clean linens daily. This includes towels, washcloths, underwear and sleepwear.
- Wash with an antibacterial soap such as Dial or Hibiclens one to two times per week.
- Take a twice weekly 15-minute bath in a full tub of water with ¼ to ½ cup of bleach added to it. If this dries your skin, add ¼ cup of mineral oil to the bath and apply a skin moisturizer after towel drying.

Remember, an MRSA infection may return if it was not completely eradicated the first time. **Seek prompt medical attention for any pimples or “spider bites.”** Your doctor may prescribe an ointment like Bactroban (mupirocin) to apply in the nose and/or armpits every night for six weeks.

For more information on treating active infections, please download the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) MRSA Patient Information Sheet from the CDC Web site at: www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/pdf/ar/MRSAPatientInfoSheet.pdf