

# MRSA at Children's

The basics of MRSA germ control on the units, clinics and in the Emergency Department

## What is *Staphylococcus aureus*?

*Staphylococcus aureus*, or *Staph aureus* for short, is a germ (bacteria) usually found on a person's skin and mucous membranes (such as the nostrils, mouth and ears). It may cause infections on broken skin or wounds, or it may be present on the body without causing infections.

## What is MRSA?

MRSA stands for methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*. Methicillin is a type of antibiotic used to treat infections caused by *Staph aureus*. If *Staph aureus* does not respond to treatment with commonly used antibiotics, it is called methicillin-resistant *Staph aureus* (MRSA). Infections caused by MRSA may be harder to treat.

## What does antibiotic resistance mean?

Antibiotics are medicines used to treat infections caused by germs called bacteria. Sometimes, commonly used antibiotics will no longer kill the germs. This is called antibiotic resistance.

## How did you find out my child has MRSA?

We test all babies and children admitted to one of our Intensive Care Units for MRSA. Also, lab tests are often done to find out if patients in the hospital have infections and your child's care provider may request a test at any time if there is a worry about MRSA.

## Will my child always have MRSA?

Most MRSA infections can be treated with medicine and good skin care. Yet your child may carry MRSA on their body for a long time. People who carry this germ on their skin and in their bodies without having an actual infection are said to be colonized with MRSA. Isolation will continue at Seattle Children's Hospital as long as your child is colonized.

Over time, your child's normal skin bacteria may take the place of MRSA. Your child will no longer have to be isolated during a hospital stay or clinic visit when they are cleared for MRSA. There are special steps you must take for your child to get MRSA clearance. If you are interested in starting this process, your child's primary care provider should call 206-987-2000 and ask to speak with someone in our Infection Prevention department for instructions.

### **What does this mean while my child is in the hospital?**

Most people who carry MRSA are healthy. If MRSA is passed to sick children or to those with an open wound from surgery, they can get a more serious infection that may be harder to treat. For this reason, a child who has MRSA is placed in Contact Isolation. While your child is in Contact Isolation:

- They will likely be in a single room.
- A card is placed on the door letting everyone know of the precautions needed before entering your child's room.
- All staff will wear gloves and gowns when entering your child's room. We usually do not wear masks since this germ is spread by person-to-person contact or touch, not through the air (as by coughing).
- All staff will make sure to clean their hands, even though they are wearing gloves. This is important after touching the patient or anything that has touched the patient, such as bedding, clothes and toys.

### **What can I do to prevent the spread of MRSA?**

- Your child should stay in their room except for tests and procedures that cannot be done in the room. If it is likely that your child's hospital stay is going to be long, talk to your nurse about arranging an activity plan for your child.
- You do not need to wear a gown and gloves, but please clean your hands well before using public spaces in the hospital such as the cafeteria, gift shop or restrooms.
- Avoid using the family lounge where you might come into close contact with patients staying on the unit.
- Clean your hands often with soap and water or hand gel, especially when going in and out of your child's room and before and after eating or helping your child eat.
- Wash your hands with soap and water after changing your child's diaper or helping them in the bathroom.
- Do not visit other families in their inpatient rooms. Do not have any direct contact with other patients or touch things at their bedside.

### **What about visitors to the hospital?**

Visitors such as neighbors and extended family will be asked to wear gowns and gloves when entering your child's hospital room. They also need to clean their hands well when leaving the room. Visitors are less likely to have come in contact with your child's infection. Sick or immune-suppressed people should not visit the hospital.

### To Learn More

- Ask your child's nurse or doctor
- Seattle King County Public Health MRSA Fact Sheet  
[www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/communicable/diseases/mrsa.aspx](http://www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/communicable/diseases/mrsa.aspx)
- Centers for Disease Control (CDC) MRSA Web page  
[www.cdc.gov/mrsa/community/](http://www.cdc.gov/mrsa/community/)
- [www.seattlechildrens.org](http://www.seattlechildrens.org)

### What about our clinic and ER visits?

We see many patients in the clinic and Emergency Department (ED) and want to be very careful not to spread MRSA to other patients. To prevent the spread of MRSA:

- Clinic and ED staff will wear a gown and gloves when seeing your child.
- We will try to get your child into the exam room as soon as possible so they have less contact with others in the waiting room.
- We ask that your child not use the waiting room play areas during your visit. Ask the front desk for coloring pages while you wait.

### Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your child's nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.

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Seattle Children's offers interpreter services for Deaf, hard of hearing or non-English speaking patients, family members and legal representatives free of charge. Seattle Children's will make this information available in alternate formats upon request. Call the Family Resource Center at 206-987-2201.

This handout has been reviewed by clinical staff at Seattle Children's. However, your child's needs are unique. Before you act or rely upon this information, please talk with your child's healthcare provider.

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