METHICILLIN RESISTANT *STAPHYLOCOCCUS AUREUS* (MRSA)

Patient Education Reference 150

What does antibiotic resistance mean?

Germs called bacteria may cause infections. Antibiotics are drugs used to treat infections caused by bacteria. Sometimes these drugs will no longer kill the germs. This is called antibiotic drug resistance.

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. It may cause infections on broken skin or wounds. Methicillin is a type of antibiotic used to treat infections caused by *Staph aureus*. If *Staph aureus* is resistant to methicillin it is called methicillin resistant *Staph aureus* (MRSA). This means that the infection may be more difficult to treat. If someone has a MRSA infection there are other antibiotics that can be used.

What is infection vs. colonization?

An infection means that germs are in or on the body and make you sick which results in signs and symptoms such as fever, pus from a wound, a high white blood cell count, or pneumonia. Germs can also be in the body, but not make you sick. This is called colonization. People who are colonized will have no signs or symptoms. They feel fine. MRSA can cause infection or colonization.

What are risk factors for getting MRSA?

Patients who have been in a hospital for a long time, are sick with a long-term illness, are on dialysis, or those who use IV drugs are at risk of getting MRSA.

How do I know if I have MRSA?

Your doctor may order a test sample from your wound, blood, urine, nose, or sputum to be sent to the lab. This test is called a culture. If there is MRSA in the sample, the culture is positive. This means you have MRSA in your body.

What will this mean for my hospital care?

All patients who have a positive culture for MRSA are placed in isolation. Isolation is used to keep from spreading MRSA to other patients. There will be a cart outside the room to hold supplies. A card will be placed on the door to alert everyone to what precautions are needed to enter your room. Hospital staff will wear gowns and gloves to care for you and will sometimes wear a mask. Visitors should report to the nurses' station for directions on what to do to enter your room. All of these steps are to keep germs from spreading to others.

Am I contagious?

Contact with the infected/colonized part of the body is usually what spreads MRSA. You can distribute it to anything you touch if you do not clean your hands. Hands may be washed with soap and water for ten seconds or sanitized with an alcohol-based cleanser.

In some cases MRSA will go away for a time, but then it may come back. For this reason, Hospital Epidemiology & Infection Control (HEIC) does not recommend routinely discontinuing isolation.

What will happen when I go home?

At home, in most cases, you only need to use good handwashing. Healthy family members, who do not have large open wounds, skin diseases, or have diabetes, are not likely to get MRSA. Based on your discharge needs, instructions will be given by the nursing staff.

What will happen if I'm back in the hospital or come to clinic?

The Johns Hopkins Hospital wants to prevent the spread of MRSA. If you come back into the hospital, you will be placed in isolation again. Cultures may be taken to see if MRSA is still present. When you go to the doctor's office or to hospital clinic appointments, you should tell the doctors and nurses that you have MRSA, so they can take steps to avoid spreading it to others.

Will I ever get rid of MRSA?

Over time your normal skin organisms may take the place of MRSA. You will no longer be isolated when cultures are negative for MRSA.

Where can I get more information about MRSA?

- Talk to your doctor or nurse.
- Call The Johns Hopkins Hospital: Hospital Epidemiology/ Infection Control Department, 410-955-8384.
- Look at the Hospital Epidemiology/Infection Control website www.hopkins-heic.org
- Look at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) website www.cdc.gov

Developed by ***The Johns Hopkins Hospital: Hospital Epidemiology and Infection Control Department.***
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