



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT MRSA

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What is MRSA?

MRSA stands for Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus. It is a form of Staphylococcus aureus, commonly referred to as “staph,” which are bacteria (germs) frequently carried on people’s skin or in their nose. MRSA refers to the type of staph which is resistant to commonly prescribed antibiotics such as methicillin, oxacillin, penicillin and amoxicillin.

Where can a person contract MRSA?

Within the past several years, there has been an increase in what is referred to as community-associated MRSA, which has emerged at daycare centers, gyms, schools and elsewhere in the community as one of the most common causes of skin infections. It has also historically been found among people with weakened immune systems who may be in the hospital or healthcare facility. However, it’s important to note that patients often bring infections into the hospital. According to a 2007 study by the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology (APIC), three of four patients with MRSA entered a healthcare facility already carrying it, having acquired MRSA either in the community or during a previous stay in a healthcare facility.

How is MRSA spread?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that MRSA is spread primarily through hand-to-hand contact or touching items that a person infected with MRSA has touched. This is why hand washing is the number one way to prevent the spread of MRSA.

What are Arizona’s hospitals doing to help prevent MRSA?

The Arizona Hospital and Healthcare Association (AzHHA) is sponsoring an aggressive education campaign targeting healthcare professionals and consumers with the goal of adopting behaviors that will prevent MRSA in both healthcare and community settings. The campaign, *Preventing MRSA: It’s In Our Hands*, focuses on preventing MRSA by promoting proper hand washing and other hygiene tips as well appropriate use of antibiotics. Blue Cross Blue Shield of Arizona is a sponsor of this campaign.

Additionally, every Arizona hospital has an active infection control program with doctors and nurses who specialize in preventing infections.

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Arizona's hospitals also have embraced the Institute for Healthcare Improvement's (IHI) *100,000 Lives Campaign* and *5 Million Lives Campaign* with nearly 85 percent of the state's inpatient hospital beds participating.

These campaigns provide hospitals with resources to help increase safety and save lives. Together, they challenge hospitals to adopt 12 patient safety strategies, five of which are focused on reducing infections, including one that combats MRSA in the hospital setting. The strategies include: 1) improved hand hygiene among healthcare workers; 2) fastidious disinfection of the environment and equipment; 3) consideration for surveillance of high risk populations; and 4) compliance with central line and ventilator bundles (a collection of best practice interventions that help protect patients from infection and other complications).

What is the healthcare community, along with the state legislature, doing to combat MRSA?

During the 2008 legislative session, Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano signed **SB 1356** into law. The legislation established an Infection Prevention and Control Advisory Committee to advise ADHS on community-associated and healthcare-associated infections.

AzHHA developed the legislation in collaboration with APIC and the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS). The bill was designed to address growing concerns among lawmakers and the public regarding infections in healthcare institutions and the community. The committee is charged with providing recommendations to ADHS regarding the reduction, prevention and control of infections in order to improve patient safety and health outcomes in Arizona. **SB 1356** requires the committee to take a holistic approach to the issue of infections by examining both healthcare-associated and community-associated infections. The bill was supported by several healthcare organizations representing physicians, nurses, physician assistants, long-term care facilities, community health centers and other healthcare organizations.

What does a MRSA infection look like?

Generally, MRSA presents as a skin infection that may look like pimples, boils or even a spider bite. MRSA may also cause serious infections such as pneumonia, bloodstream infections or surgical wound infections.

Will everyone with MRSA develop these symptoms?

Not necessarily. There are people who are colonized, meaning they are considered carriers and may carry the germs, but not have any signs or symptoms.

Why is MRSA resistant to common antibiotics?

Antibiotic use, or *misuse*, is a primary reason. Frequent exposure to antibiotics, not taking antibiotics as directed and taking antibiotics unnecessarily (e.g., for a viral infection) all may reduce the body's resistance to antibiotics. Along with hand washing and other hygiene matters, *Preventing MRSA: It's In Our Hands* also focuses on correct use of antibiotics.

Can the MRSA infection be treated?

Yes, but since it is resistant to many common antibiotics, it can be hard to treat. Healthcare workers will typically culture the site and have the sample analyzed at a lab to help them determine the antibiotic most likely to effectively treat the infection.

How can MRSA be prevented?

The best way is through proper hand washing for at least 15 seconds using soap and warm water or alcohol-based waterless hand sanitizers. There are other ways to help prevent MRSA.

- Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healed, changing bandages often, especially when they get wet.
- Make sure drainage from a wound does not come in contact with people or objects. If it does, wash thoroughly.
- Avoid sharing personal items such as towels, washcloths, bar soap or razors.
- Frequently clean and disinfect objects (such as gym and sports equipment) and commonly touched surfaces (countertops, keyboards, light switches and door knobs).
- Wash clothes, linens and towels in hot water and laundry detergent. Using a hot dryer, rather than air-drying, also helps kill germs. When collecting laundry, hold it away from your clothing to prevent the spread of germs.
- Practicing antibiotic stewardship by taking all prescribed doses and obtaining them from the proper source, as opposed to sharing them or getting them from other countries.
- People with MRSA in their lungs should cover their mouths with disposable tissues when coughing.