

You can stop the spread of MRSA by keeping your hands clean.

Living With Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*

This brochure is a supplement to the guidelines from your healthcare provider. Please discuss any questions or concerns with your healthcare provider.

There are 2 ways you can have methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA). You can be infected with MRSA or be a carrier (“colonized”).

- **Infected** — You have symptoms. This is usually a sore or infected cut that is red, swollen, painful and/or pus-filled. The type of symptoms depends on the location of the infection.
- **Carrier** — MRSA is present on or in your body, but does not cause infection or an illness.

The most important things to do if you are living with MRSA include:

- **Good personal hygiene. This is the best way to prevent the spread of MRSA.**
- Keep your hands clean. You may use an alcohol-based hand rub or soap and water. Always wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. Clean your hands with soap and water if they are visibly soiled.
- Take care of yourself — eat right, exercise, do not smoke and avoid stress.
- Keep skin infections covered to avoid spreading MRSA to others.

How to stop MRSA from spreading

The best way to stop the spread of MRSA is to keep your hands clean. Use a paper towel to dry your hands or a cloth specifically for this purpose. Clean your hands often and at these times:

- Before preparing food, eating or drinking
- Before and after touching your eyes, nose, mouth, genitals, sores, acne, boils or rashes
- Before and after blowing your nose
- After coughing or sneezing
- Before and after using the bathroom
- After touching urine, feces and body fluids, including items soiled with body fluids, such as bedding
- Before and after changing bandages

- After cleaning the bathroom, changing bedding and doing laundry
- After touching surfaces other people touch, such as phones, doorknobs or shopping carts

Other actions you can take to prevent the spread of infection include:

- Carry hand sanitizer to clean your hands if soap and water are not available
- Keep your fingernails short to keep bacteria from growing underneath
- Avoid touching, poking or squeezing sores
- Cover your nose and mouth when sneezing or coughing
- Dispose of tissues after each use
- Clean cuts or scrapes with soap and water and cover with a bandage. Seek medical care if you have redness, swelling, pain or pus
- Bathe or shower with soap every day and after playing sports or working out at a gym
- Avoid sharing towels, razors, toothbrushes or other personal items
- Change your clothes every day and wash them before wearing them again
- Wash sheets and towels regularly
- Avoid contact sports, public gyms, saunas, hot tubs, pools, manicures, pedicures, and massages until sores have healed
- Thoroughly clean your bathroom
- Wear gloves and wash your hands if you have handled urine or feces
- Tell your physician and/or nurse if you have had MRSA in the past

How to change a bandage

If you have a wound that needs a bandage change, follow these steps:

1. Wash your hands well with soap and water, and then dry them.
2. Put on clean, disposable gloves.
3. Carefully remove the old bandage.
4. Put the old bandage into a plastic bag. Take off the gloves and put them in the bag.
5. Be careful not to get any pus or body fluids on surfaces or other people.
6. Before applying the new bandage, wash and dry your hands well and put on clean, disposable gloves.
7. Apply the new bandage. If needed, cover your wound with extra bandages to keep the drainage from leaking through.
8. Take off the second pair of gloves and put them in the plastic bag. Seal or tie up the bag and throw it away in the trash.
9. When you are finished, wash your hands well.

Special precautions

If you have MRSA, please follow these special precautions when you visit a clinic or hospital:

- Ask your healthcare providers to wash their hands before and after caring for you.
- Tell your healthcare providers if you have ever had an active MRSA *infection* or if you are a *carrier*.
- If you are coughing, you may be asked to wear a mask.
- If you are in a healthcare facility, you may be placed on isolation precautions. Staff may wear gowns, gloves and/or masks to care for you.
- Visitors should report to the nurses' station for directions on what to do before entering your room.

Cleaning your home

MRSA can live on surfaces for days, weeks and months. It is important to clean surfaces often with a disinfectant. Pay attention to items that are used often, such as light switches, doorknobs, phones, toilets (including the handle), sinks, tubs, faucet handles, kitchen counters, appliance handles, cell phones, pagers and computer keyboards.

Disinfectants to use:

- Use any cleaner you can buy at the grocery store that has the word "disinfectant" on it. Remember to read the label and follow the directions.
- If a store-bought disinfectant is not available, make a solution of bleach and water. Mix 1 tablespoon bleach with 1 quart of water. Place in a spray bottle and label it "bleach solution."
- Make a fresh solution each time you plan to clean. Over time, the solution becomes less effective as the bleach evaporates out of the water.

For your safety:

- Never mix bleach with other cleaners, especially ammonia. This can create a dangerous, toxic gas.
- Keep the bleach solution away from children, and do not put it in bottles that could be mistaken for something to drink.

If body fluids or pus get onto a surface, follow these steps:

1. Put on disposable gloves.
2. Wipe up the fluids with a paper towel.
3. Throw the paper towel in the trash.
4. Clean the surface thoroughly using disinfectant and a paper towel.
5. Throw the paper towel in the trash.
6. Wipe the surface again with the disinfectant and let it dry for at least 30 seconds.

7. Throw the paper towel in the trash.
8. Remove your gloves and throw them in the trash.
9. Wash your hands thoroughly.

Pets and MRSA

Pets, including dogs and cats, can have an active MRSA infection or be carriers. If you keep getting MRSA infections, or if you see any sign of a skin infection on your pet, talk with your veterinarian about getting your pet tested.

Pets with a MRSA infection can be treated. Follow the guidelines suggested by your veterinarian. Wear gloves and wash your hands with soap and water when caring for your pet's sores.

For additional tips on how to stop the spread of MRSA:

- Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at [cdc.gov/mrsa/community/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/mrsa/community/index.html)
- Contact your local health department or the Illinois Department of Public Health at 217.782.2016