

*Keeping your
hands clean is
the best way to
prevent disease.*

Living With MRSA

The information in this brochure is meant to supplement guidelines from your health care provider. Make sure to discuss questions or concerns with your health care provider.

The Most Important Things to Remember About Living with MRSA

- **Good personal hygiene 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 15 seconds. Be sure to clean your hands with soap and water if they are visibly soiled.
- Take care of yourself—eat right, exercise, don't smoke and avoid stress.
- Keep skin infections covered to avoid spreading MRSA to others.

A Person may be Colonized or Infected with MRSA

- **Colonized** means that MRSA is present on or in the body but does not cause infection or an illness.
- **Infected** means there are symptoms present. The type of symptoms depends on the location of the infection.

How to Stop MRSA from Spreading

The number one way to prevent the spread of infection is to keep your hands clean. Use a designated cloth or paper towel to dry hands. Hands should be cleaned:

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

- After cleaning the bathroom, changing bedding, and doing laundry.
- After touching things other people touch, such as phones, door knobs or shopping carts.

Also be sure to:

- Carry hand sanitizer so hands can be cleaned if soap and water are not available.
- Keep fingernails short to keep the bacteria from growing under and on nails.
- Avoid touching, poking or squeezing sores.
- Cover 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 there is redness, swelling, pain or pus.
- Bathe or shower with soap daily and after playing sports or working out at a gym to help reduce the amount of skin bacteria.
- Avoid sharing towels, razors, toothbrushes or other personal items.
- Change clothes daily and wash before wearing again.
- Wash sheets and towels regularly.
- Avoid contact sports, public gyms, saunas, hot tubs or pools, manicures, pedicures or massages until sores have healed.
- Thoroughly clean the bathroom if MRSA is in urine or feces. People handling urine or feces should wear gloves and wash hands afterwards.
- Tell your doctor and/or nurse that you have had MRSA in the past.

How to Change Bandages

- Wash hands well with soap and water.
- Put on clean disposable gloves.
- Remove the old bandage.
- Put the old bandage into a plastic bag. Take off the gloves and put them in the plastic bag.
- Be careful not to get any pus or body fluids on surfaces or other people.
- Wash hands well.
- Put on clean disposable gloves.
- Apply the new bandage. If needed, cover with extra dressings to keep the drainage from leaking through.
- 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.
- Wash hands well.

Special Precautions to Take When Going to a Clinic or Hospital if You Have MRSA

- Ask your health care providers to wash their hands before and after caring for you.
- If you have ever had an active MRSA *infection* or if you are *colonized*, tell your health care providers.
- If you are coughing, you may be asked to wear a mask.
- If you are in a health care 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 to enter your room.

How to Clean Your House

MRSA bacteria can live on surfaces for days, weeks and months. It is important to clean 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 one tablespoon bleach into one quart of water in a spray bottle and label it "bleach solution."
- Make fresh solution each time you plan to clean because the bleach evaporates out of the water making it less effective.
- Never mix bleach with other cleaners, especially ammonia.
- 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 surfaces, you will need to do the following:

- Put on disposable gloves.
- Wipe up the fluids with a paper towel.
- Throw the paper towel in the trash.
- Clean the surface thoroughly using disinfectant and a paper towel.
- Throw the paper towel in the trash.
- Then wipe the surface again with the disinfectant and let it dry for at least 30 seconds.
- Throw the paper towel in the trash.
- Remove your gloves and throw them in the trash.
- Wash hands thoroughly.

Precautions to Take When Doing Laundry

- When collecting laundry or changing sheets, hold the dirty laundry away from the body and clothes. This will prevent bacteria from getting on clothes.
- Wear disposable gloves to handle laundry that is soiled with body fluids, including drainage from a sore, urine or feces. Immediately put the laundry into the washer or a plastic bag until it can be washed.
- Wash laundry with warm or hot water and use bleach if possible.
- Dry laundry in a warm or hot dryer and make sure the clothes are completely dry.
- Wash hands thoroughly after handling dirty laundry and before handling clean laundry, even if gloves have been worn.
- Throw gloves away. Do not reuse them.

Pets and MRSA

- Pets, including dogs and cats, can also get MRSA.
- Pets can have active infections or they can be carriers.
- If you keep getting MRSA infections, or if you see any sign of a skin infection on your pet, talk with your vet about testing your pet.
- Pets with MRSA can be treated.
- If your pet has MRSA, follow the guidelines suggested by the pet's veterinary professional.
- Make sure to wear gloves and wash your hands with soap and water when caring for the pet's sores.

Adapted with permission of Metropolitan Chicago Health Care.

Resources

- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC)
www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_mrsa_ca_public.html.
- Your local health department.

Health Information Resources

For more information, visit Northwestern Memorial Hospital's Alberto Culver Health Learning Center. This state-of-the-art health library is located on the 3rd floor of the Galter Pavilion. Health information professionals are available to help you find the information you need and provide you with personalized support at no charge. You may contact the Health Learning Center by calling 312-926-LINK (5465) or by sending an e-mail to hlc@nmh.org.

Para asistencia en español, por favor llamar al Departamento de Representantes para Pacientes al 312-926-3112.

The entities that come together as Northwestern Medicine are committed to representing the communities we serve, fostering a culture of inclusion, delivering culturally competent care, providing access to treatment and programs in a nondiscriminatory manner and eliminating healthcare disparities. For questions, please call either Northwestern Memorial Hospital's Patient Representatives Department at 312-926-3112, TDD/TTY 312-944-2358 and/or the Northwestern Medical Group Patient Representatives Department at 312-926-1920, TDD/TTY 312-695-3661.

Developed by: Department of Infection Control and Prevention

©November 2012 Northwestern Medicine

For additional information about Northwestern Memorial Hospital, please visit our website at www.nmh.org.
900883 (11/12)