Staphylococcus aureus

What is Staphylococcus aureus?

Staphylococcus aureus (S. aureus) is a germ (bacteria) that can normally be found in the nose and on the skin. There are different kinds of S. aureus which can be present on the human body.

What is MRSA?

MRSA (methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus) is a type of S. aureus that does not respond to some antibiotics (including methicillin which is related to penicillin). This means a MRSA infection may be more difficult to treat. This germ is found in two percent of the population.

What is MSSA?

MSSA (methicillin-sensitive Staphylococcus aureus) is a type of S. aureus that responds well to typical antibiotics. This germ is found in close to 40 percent of the general population.

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Signs and symptoms of MRSA infection:

- Fever
- Sores that are not healing
- Sores that are draining
- Heat in the area of the sore
- Pain
- It may start out looking like an insect bite or pimple. You can also get a MRSA infection in your lungs, bladder, kidneys, at a surgery site, or in your blood.

What if I have an active infection?

- Wash your hands with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand cleanser often. Insist that others that care for you also wash often.
- Keep wounds and sores covered with clean, dry dressings. Soiled dressings should be placed in a plastic bag and placed in the trash.
- Do not share personal items such as razors, towels, wash cloths, or clothing.
- Wash soiled linens and clothes with hot water and laundry soap. Dry them in a hot dryer.
- Avoid skin-to-skin contact until all sores are healed.
- See your health provider if you think you have a skin infection and follow all treatment instructions.
- Tell your provider if you have had a past MRSA infection or colonization.

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What is Colonization?
MRSA or MSSA colonization is when the germ is found on or in the body but there are no signs or symptoms of illness or infection. One of the common areas of colonization is in the nose.

How do I know if I have MRSA or MSSA colonization?
A swab of the inside of the nose can determine MRSA or MSSA colonization. The swab is done at the EMMC Surgical Navigation when you come in for your pre-operative testing and then sent to the lab for testing.

Why am I being tested MRSA/MSSA colonization?
Surgical patients are tested for MRSA/MSSA because we can decrease the risk of post-surgical infection with MRSA and MSSA by treating known colonized patients with a nasal antibiotic ointment before their surgery.

What if I test positive for MRSA or MSSA colonization?
If your nasal swab tests positive for MRSA or MSSA, we will prescribe antibiotic ointment that you will place in your nose twice a day for five days before your surgery date. The prescription for the antibiotic ointment will be faxed to your pharmacy. You will be contacted by EMMC Surgical Navigation only if your test results are positive.

How are bacteria spread?
Bacteria commonly found in the nose can be spread to others by directly sneezing or coughing on another person, or by contaminated hands after using a tissue or simply rubbing your nose.

Washing your hands and covering your cough/sneeze greatly reduces spreading germs. Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 15 seconds or use an alcohol-based cleaner, especially after touching wounds, dressings, using the toilet, coughing or blowing your nose.

Other ways to prevent spreading bacteria is not to share towels, razors, toothbrushes, or other personal items.

What happens in the hospital if I test positive for MRSA colonization?
The Centers for Disease Control recommend additional precautions be taken in hospitals to reduce the risk of spreading certain germs such as MRSA from patient to patient. To decrease the risk of spreading MRSA to another patient which can be present on the skin or on room surfaces, hospital staff will wear gowns and gloves when providing care.

What happens in the hospital if I test positive for MSSA colonization?
The Centers for Disease Control does not recommend any additional precautions be taken in hospitals to reduce the risk of spreading MSSA.

All visitors are encouraged to wash their hands with soap and water or an alcohol based hand cleaner before entering or leaving any hospital room.