



MRSA

What is MRSA (Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus)?

Staphylococcus aureus are bacteria that are commonly found on people's skin, in the nose, armpits and groins. About three or four out of every 10 people carry this bacterium in their nose without causing an infection or disease. This is known as the carrier or colonization state.

Staphylococcus aureus, when it does cause problems, is the most common cause of pus or infection in boils, pimples, wounds, impetigo and conjunctivitis (eye infections). It can also be the cause of bacterial pneumonia and urinary tract infections.

Staph aureus became resistant to penicillin in the 1940s. Methicillin, an antibiotic that is closely related to penicillin was effective against staph aureus. It became the most commonly used antibiotic in treating infections. Because bacteria will naturally become resistant to a drug over time now, up to 40% of all staph aureus is also resistant to methicillin, thus the name methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus (MRSA).

Antibiotic resistance means the germ is no longer killed by the antibiotic. It is of greatest concern in hospitals where people are seriously ill such as surgical wards, neonatal units and burn units in hospitals. Patients in these areas of the hospital tend to be very sick which weakens their ability to fight off infection.

Generally, MRSA is not transmitted through the air. Objects and surfaces are not believed to be an important factor in the transmission of the bacteria as it prefers a warm, moist place to live.

MRSA is antibiotic resistant not disinfectant resistant. Regular housekeeping and cleaning procedures are adequate to kill these bacteria on surfaces.



What are the symptoms of MRSA?

The symptoms of MRSA are no different than the symptoms of any infection due to staph aureus. The symptoms will depend on where the infection is occurring. For instance, with wounds, it will cause redness of the surrounding skin and a discharge from the wound. If the infection is serious, fever, tiredness and headache may also be present. If it is in the urine, it may cause a burning sensation during urination or having to urinate frequently.

How do you catch MRSA?

MRSA is spread by direct contact, i.e. touching. It likes to live on warm, moist, hairy surfaces such as in the nose, armpits and groins. It does not survive for very long on dry, exposed surfaces, such as the face or on objects. If you touch something or someone with living MRSA on it, your hands will become contaminated with MRSA. Therefore, proper hand washing is the best way to protect yourself.

Persons most at risk of getting sick from catching MRSA are those with wounds, tubes or lines, the elderly or debilitated and those who have received previous, extensive antibiotic therapy. Healthy people may become colonized with MRSA but are very unlikely to develop any disease or infection with it.

Is MRSA treatable?

Yes. An MRSA infection can still be treated with other types of antibiotics. In hospital, the patient may be treated with an antibiotic given through the IV (intravenous) line. When someone has MRSA on the skin or in the nose (i.e. carrier state), a combination of an ointment, special antiseptic soap and oral antibiotic may be used. Some hospitals may use isolation (a private room) to make sure that the bacteria does not spread to other patients.

How do I know I have it?

You have to be tested for it. If you have an infection your doctor will take a specimen (swab of infected area or urine sample) and send it to the laboratory for analysis. To know what germ is causing any illness, it has to be confirmed by testing.

Remember, hand washing is the most effective way to prevent the spread of a MRSA infection from person to person.

For more information, please contact a member of Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit's Infectious Disease Team.

Updated June 2018