



Weill Cornell Medical College

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Patient Education:

MRSA Infection, Pediatric

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MRSA Infection, Pediatric

MRSA stands for methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*. This type of infection is caused by *Staphylococcus aureus* bacteria that are no longer affected by the medicines usually prescribed to kill them (*drug resistant*). MRSA can cause an infection that is hard to treat. If your child has MRSA, your child's health care provider may need to use less common and more powerful types of antibiotic medicine. These are called broad-spectrum antibiotics.

There are two types of MRSA infections:

- Hospital-acquired MRSA is bacteria that you get in the hospital.
- Community-acquired MRSA is bacteria that you get outside a hospital.

CAUSES

Hospital-acquired MRSA is caused when a hospital procedure or equipment introduces MRSA into your child's body. Examples include feeding tubes or IV tubes. If your child needs to be in the hospital for a long time, he or she has a higher risk of becoming infected with MRSA.

Community-acquired MRSA is caused when bacteria get into a cut or scratch at home or during play. MRSA could already be living on your child's skin, or it could come from another person if there is skin-to-skin contact.

RISK FACTORS

For an infant, spending time in the neonatal intensive care unit is a big risk factor. Infants admitted to intensive care usually have significant health problems that may weaken their defense system. They are also exposed to a lot of hospital equipment and hospital procedures. The longer the stay in intensive care, the higher the risk. Infants may also be at risk of coming in contact with MRSA from an infected mother during birth. This risk is very low.

Risk factors for children may include:

- Close skin-to-skin contact with others.
- Having a skin condition (such as eczema).
- Untreated or uncovered cuts and scratches.
- Sharing toys, towels, clothing, sheets, or sports equipment with other children.
- Not washing frequently.

SYMPTOMS

Community-acquired MRSA infections in children are usually skin infections that appear as:

- A bump or pimple that is red and tender.
- An area of skin that is warm to the touch.
- An area of the skin that drains pus.
- A skin infection with a fever.

Hospital-acquired MRSA may also cause skin infections. These infections can:

- Spread into the bloodstream.
- Cause high fever.
- Cause pneumonia.
- Cause bone and joint infections.

DIAGNOSIS

The diagnosis of MRSA is made by taking a sample from an infected area and sending it to a lab for testing. A lab technician can grow (*culture*) MRSA and check it under a microscope. The cultured MRSA can be tested to see which type of antibiotic medicine will work to treat it. Your child may also have:

- Imaging studies (such as X-ray or MRI) to check if the infection has spread to the lungs, bones, or joints.
- A culture and sensitivity test of blood or fluids from inside the joints.

TREATMENT

Treatment varies and is based on how serious, how deep, or how extensive the infection is.

- Some skin infections, such as a small boil or sore (*abscess*), may be treated by draining pus from the site of the infection.
- Deeper or more widespread soft tissue infections are usually treated with surgery to drain pus and antibiotic medicine given by mouth or through a vein.
- Serious infections may require a hospital stay.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

Follow the home care instructions from your child's health care provider. Ask your child's health care provider if other members of your household should be checked for MRSA.

Caring for an infant with MRSA:

- Only give your infant medicines as directed by your infant's health care provider.
- If your infant needs to take antibiotic medicine, follow the directions carefully. Take the medicine as prescribed until it is finished.
- Wash your hands before and after you change your infant's diapers or touch the infected area.
- Wash your hands before mixing your infant's formula.
- Keep your infant out of close contact with others.
- Keep all follow-up appointments.

Caring for a child with MRSA:

- Only give your child medicines as directed by your child's health care provider.

- If your child needs to take antibiotic medicine, follow the directions carefully. Take the medicine as prescribed until it is finished.
- Make sure your child washes his or her hands frequently with soap and water.
- Spray your child's hands with an alcohol-based sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Clean any cuts or scrapes with soap and water.
- Cover cuts and scrapes with a clean dry bandage. Change the bandage at least once a day.
- **Do not** let your child pick at scabs.
- **Do not** try to drain any infection or pimples.
- Wash your child's toys and play areas often.
- **Do not** share your child's towels, washcloths, or clothing.
- Wash your child's clothing, bedding, and towels often in the washing machine. Use hot water. Dry them in the dryer on the hottest setting.
- Keep all follow-up appointments.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

Your child has a skin infection that is:

- Red.
- Tender.
- Swollen.
- Warm.
- Filled with pus.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Your child has a skin infection and a fever.
- Your child has a skin infection and joint pain.
- Your child has trouble breathing.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your child's condition.
- Will get help right away if your child is not doing well or gets worse.

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.

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