

The Straight Story on MRSA

FACTS

Staphylococcus aureus (staph) is a type of bacteria commonly found on the skin. Sometimes it can get into the body and cause an infection. Most pimples, boils, and minor skin infections are caused by staph, but staph can also cause blood infections and pneumonia. Some staph can no longer be killed by most antibiotics. It has become resistant. When staph is resistant to the powerful antibiotic methicillin, it is called methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus, or MRSA (pronounced mersa). It is difficult to treat, but there are a few antibiotics that can still cure MRSA infections. The antibiotic most often used to treat persons with MRSA infections is vancomycin, which is usually given intravenously (IV).

The people most likely to get MRSA are:

- » infants under the age of six months
- » patients who have been in the hospital and are elderly and frail
- » individuals with open wounds, catheters or feeding tubes.

Since these are the very people you take care of, it is important that you know about MRSA.

Sometimes MRSA does not cause the person to become sick (infected) but the bacteria are present in the body (colonized). MRSA is found on the skin, in the nose, and in blood and urine. Colonized people can spread MRSA. If you are healthy, you are not likely to get MRSA. You should not be afraid to take care of patients infected with MRSA. Healthy family members of patients with MRSA are also at little risk of getting infected.

No one knows for sure how common MRSA is, but as many as 80,000 patients a year become infected with MRSA while they are in the hospital. The number is increasing, and there are also people who get MRSA even though they have not been hospitalized. There is no way to know how many people are colonized, since they do not become sick.

MRSA is almost always spread by the hands after physical contact with the infected (or colonized) person. It can also be picked up from surfaces in the home, including tables, side rails, or equipment which has had body fluids on it. The most common way that MRSA is spread is by the hands of health care workers like you. Since you travel from patient to patient it is very important that you do not carry MRSA from one home to another or carry it home to your new baby or frail family member. The best protection: Wash your hands.

Remember these other important points when taking care of a patient with MRSA:

- » There is no need for special handling of food or dishes.
- » Wash clothing that is not soiled with urine or stool with other linens.
- » Wash linen heavily soiled with secretions, urine or stool promptly and separately from the family wash.
- » Encourage all family members, whether healthy or not, to wash their hands carefully after contact with the patient, and always before they leave the house.

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CASE STUDY: MRS. MIMS HAS MRSA

Mrs. Mims is an elderly woman who has been in and out of the hospital many times in the past year. She has draining wounds on her legs and you are her home health aide. The nurse tells you that Mrs. Mims has MRSA infection in her wounds and in her urine. The nurse also reminds you that following universal precautions reduces the danger of transmission of MRSA to others.

Here are some things you need to know and do to keep your other patients and your family safe.

Handwashing is the most important thing you can do. Without handwashing, MRSA can survive on your hands up to three hours. Do not use the family soap and towels; bring your own soap and paper towels. Wash your hands with soap and running water:

- » upon entering any patient's home
- » after taking off gloves, before you touch anything else
- » at the sink closest to the room
- » just before you leave the home, the last thing you do. (If Mrs. Mims is able to walk around, use a paper towel to open the door as you leave. It's possible that she could contaminate the doorknob with MRSA. The paper towel protects you.)

Wear gloves when there is any chance that your hands will come in contact with body fluids, and when you are in close contact with any patients who have MRSA. For Mrs. Mims, you should also wear gloves when cleaning her room, especially the areas she may touch frequently.

Wear a gown when you are bathing Mrs. Mims, changing her linen, and putting the linen in the laundry hamper.

Do not take into her home equipment, like a blood pressure cuff, that you will take into other patient's homes.

Learn the facts about MRSA to help protect Mrs. Mims's family as well. The nurse will teach them what they should do. But, as the home health aide, you are more likely to see what they actually do. Remember these facts.

- » MRSA rarely affects healthy people, but healthy people can spread it with their hands if they don't wash them as they should.
- » Mrs. Mims doesn't need to have her own special dishes.
- » There is no need to keep Mrs. Mims away from the rest of the family. It is alright for them to touch and hug her.
- » Mrs. Mims doesn't have to have a separate bedroom.
- » Family members should wear gloves when they handle anything that might have come in contact with Mrs. Mims's drainage or urine.
- » Family members should always wash their hands after contact with Mrs. Mims and visitors should also wash their hands before leaving the house.

THINK ABOUT IT

Imagine you have just made a visit to Mrs. Mims. On a separate sheet, list all the places you can think of where MRSA might be found. If you touched these places, you might have gotten MRSA on your hands.

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DIRECTIONS: READ EACH QUESTION CAREFULLY. THEN, DETERMINE THE BEST ANSWER. CHECK THE CORRESPONDING BOX ON YOUR ANSWER SHEET. DO NOT WRITE ON THIS POST-TEST.

1. How is MRSA usually spread?
 - a. Through unprotected sexual intercourse
 - b. Through the air
 - c. By mosquito bites
 - d. Through direct contact, usually the hands

2. Healthy home health aides are at high risk of getting MRSA from their patients.
 - a. True
 - b. False

3. A patient with MRSA has a daughter who says to you, "I really don't want Mother to eat at the table with the rest of us. I'm afraid we'll all catch what she has!" What should you say to the daughter?
 - a. "There is no danger to the family in having your mother at the table and using the same dishes your family uses."
 - b. "Have your mother sit at the end of the table and use paper plates."
 - c. "You're absolutely right. Your mother shouldn't sit at the table with the family."
 - d. "You're very inconsiderate and unkind to even think about doing such a thing."

4. Which of the following people is MRSA most likely to infect?
 - a. Teenagers who are sexually active
 - b. People who work in hospitals or nursing homes
 - c. People with heart attacks who don't take their aspirin
 - d. People who have frequent admissions to hospitals or nursing homes

5. MRSA is bacteria that cannot be killed by most antibiotics.
 - a. True
 - b. False

6. Which of the following is a true statement about handwashing?
 - a. It is not necessary to wash your hands if you have been wearing gloves, since your hands don't get dirty.
 - b. You should wash your hands upon entering a patient's home.
 - c. You don't have to use soap unless you have broken skin.
 - d. There is no need to wash your hands until you are finished with the visit since they will just get dirty again.

7. The antibiotic most often used to treat MRSA is vancomycin, given intravenously.
 - a. True
 - b. False

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POST-TEST, PAGE 2

8. One of your co-workers tells you she is afraid that, if she takes care of MRSA patients, she might take MRSA home to her family. What should you tell her?
- "If you follow universal precautions, there is practically no danger of transmitting MRSA either to your family or other patients."
 - "I don't blame you! We should all refuse to take care of patients who have MRSA."
 - "It's only a concern if you are pregnant."
 - "MRSA kills more people than AIDS."
9. Which of the following is a true statement?
- Healthy people are not usually at risk of getting MRSA.
 - People who are elderly and frail and have catheters or feeding tubes are at greater risk of getting MRSA.
 - Chronically ill people who are frequently hospitalized are at greater risk of getting MRSA.
 - All of the above statements are true about MRSA.
10. MRSA can only be spread from patients who are sick (infected) and cannot be spread from people who have the bacteria but are not sick (colonized).
- True
 - False

— END —

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NAME _____ DATE _____

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MULTIPLE CHOICE ANSWER SHEET

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|-----|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. | <input type="checkbox"/> a | <input type="checkbox"/> b | <input type="checkbox"/> c | <input type="checkbox"/> d |
| 2. | <input type="checkbox"/> a | <input type="checkbox"/> b | | |
| 3. | <input type="checkbox"/> a | <input type="checkbox"/> b | <input type="checkbox"/> c | <input type="checkbox"/> d |
| 4. | <input type="checkbox"/> a | <input type="checkbox"/> b | <input type="checkbox"/> c | <input type="checkbox"/> d |
| 5. | <input type="checkbox"/> a | <input type="checkbox"/> b | | |
| 6. | <input type="checkbox"/> a | <input type="checkbox"/> b | <input type="checkbox"/> c | <input type="checkbox"/> d |
| 7. | <input type="checkbox"/> a | <input type="checkbox"/> b | | |
| 8. | <input type="checkbox"/> a | <input type="checkbox"/> b | <input type="checkbox"/> c | <input type="checkbox"/> d |
| 9. | <input type="checkbox"/> a | <input type="checkbox"/> b | <input type="checkbox"/> c | <input type="checkbox"/> d |
| 10. | <input type="checkbox"/> a | <input type="checkbox"/> b | | |

INSTRUCTOR'S COMMENTS/SIGNATURE

Signature _____ RN _____ Date _____

