

Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA)

Patient information. County Medical Officers' infection prevention sheet.

What is MRSA?

MRSA stands for "*Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus*". MRSA means that the Staphylococcus bacteria are resistant to certain antibiotics. In other aspects, they are the same as regular antibiotic-sensitive Staphylococcus bacteria. *Staphylococcus aureus* are bacteria normally found in the skin or mucous membranes without causing any problems. It is common to be a **carrier** of such bacteria without being sick. *Staphylococcus aureus* can sometimes cause **infections** that may require treatment, such as wound infections, abscesses and impetigo (school sores).

Are there risks associated with MRSA?

MRSA does not cause more infections, but the infections can be difficult to treat. There is a risk that it might take a long time to get well and that the antibiotics which must be used will have more side effects. There is also a risk that resistant bacteria can spread through the healthcare facility, where many patients are particularly vulnerable to infection and where a lot of antibiotics are used. This applies in particular to hospitals abroad, where MRSA tends to be more common than in Sweden.

How is MRSA spread?

A person who is a MRSA carrier rarely infects others. The risk of transmission increases if a person has infections in the skin, eczema or wounds that are slow to heal or are seeping fluid. Such conditions are called **risk factors** for the spread of infection. Risk factors also include certain chronic skin diseases as well as stomata and catheters that pass through the skin and mucous membranes. A lot of bacteria are found in or on these risk factors. A MRSA carrier who has risk factors for the spread of infection can infect others in their family, at preschool/school, through contact with animals, through physical contact while playing sports as well as in training facilities and at the gym. MRSA is spread via the hands to other persons and can also fasten on objects in the person's surroundings, such as handles and training mats. It can also be spread at hospitals, in elderly care centres and in other healthcare environments.

Is it possible to get rid of MRSA?

Commonly, MRSA will no longer show up in samples after a period of time has passed. The time varies from months to years and can be difficult to predict. The doctor in charge of the MRSA case and the County Medical Officer decide together when MRSA-related checks and rules of conduct are no longer required. This assessment can be made when MRSA is no longer found in samples taken on at least three consecutive occasions over the course of at least one year.

What should you bear in mind?

- Good hand hygiene is the best measure for preventing the spread of infection. Wash your hands with liquid soap.
- You can spend time with others as usual provided you are only a carrier of MRSA and do not have any risk factors for the spread of infection.
- If you have risk factors for the spread of infection, there is a greater risk that you will infect others. In such cases, it is vital to practice good hygiene. Make sure you thoroughly wash your hands. Use your own towel and your own toiletries. Shower instead of taking a bath. Cover wounds with bandages and replace the bandage if fluid seeps through. If you have a catheter, you should keep it under your clothes. Wash your hands after any contact with a wound or catheter.

- If you have a skin infection, eczema or wounds that are slow to heal or are seeping fluid, avoid participating in sports with a lot of physical contact and avoid using shared training facilities or going to the gym.
- If you have risk factors for the spread of infection, it is important that you practice good hand hygiene when in contact with animals since they can also be MRSA carriers.

Special advice and recommendations

- Healthcare staff and students should not participate in care work if they have risk factors for the spread of infection. At care units with particularly sensitive patients, staff must be shown to have MRSA-free samples before they can participate in care work.
- Children can generally attend preschool/school and participate in all activities. However, they should stay home from preschool/school if they have a skin infection, eczema or wounds that are slow to heal or are seeping fluid.
- Individuals who work professionally with animals must take care not to infect the animals. Advice can be provided by the County Medical Officer along with the Veterinary Expert of the Regional Government.

Rules of conduct you must follow according to the Swedish Communicable Diseases Act

- You must attend the return visits and provide the samples which your doctor considers necessary.
- You must assist with contact tracing. This entails providing information to enable the healthcare staff to assess when, where and how you could have been infected and whether you might have infected others.
- You must give notice of your MRSA infection when receiving medical care, dental care or chiropody care. This also applies if you receive personal care or live in a residential care facility. If you only receive help in shopping, cleaning, dividing medicine or going for walks, then it is not usually necessary to give notice of your MRSA infection.
- If you have risk factors for the spread of infection, you must give notice of your MRSA infection if getting a piercing, tattoo, massage, non-medical foot care or any similar treatment of the skin or mucous membranes. You could also wait to perform such treatment until the risk factors are no longer present.

MRSA is a public health hazard according to the Swedish Communicable Diseases Act. You are therefore obliged to follow the rules of conduct you receive from your doctor. You may request reassessment of the rules of conduct by the County Medical Officer in your county.