Intermountain® Healthcare

MRSA and New Mothers

What is MRSA?

MRSA, commonly pronounced "mer-suh," stands for methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus. It is one type of the Staphylococcus aureus germ (commonly called "Staph"). About 1 in 3 people have Staph germs on their skin or in their nose, and normally the germs don't cause problems. Sometimes, though, these germs cause serious infections (called "Staph infections") on the skin, in the blood, or in other areas of your body.

Staph infections are usually treated with antibiotics. Some Staph infections, however, are resistant to the antibiotics usually used. This means the antibiotics don't kill the germs. MRSA is a type of Staph that is resistant to the antibiotics most often used to treat Staph infections.

MRSA germs can affect you in 2 ways:

- **Active infection** means the germ is multiplying and causing an illness or a skin sore. A skin sore may look like a red bump or a cluster of bumps.
- **Colonization** means the germs are on your skin or in your nose, but not causing any symptoms or active infection.

Either way, the germ can be transferred from you to another person. It could then cause an infection in another person. That's why, if you're a new mother, healthcare workers will take extra precautions with both you and your baby.

How is MRSA treated?

There are specific antibiotics that can kill MRSA germs. Some patients with MRSA infections may need surgery to drain the sores. Your healthcare providers will decide which treatments are best for you.

You will be treated for MRSA only if you have an active infection, such as a wound, a rash, or a blood infection.

How does MRSA spread?

In the hospital, MRSA can spread from one person to another on the hands of healthcare providers, patients, or visitors. (This is why hand washing is so important!) It can also spread on contaminated objects, such as bed linens, bed rails, bathroom fixtures, or medical equipment.

If you have MRSA, you'll be given special care to help keep the germs from spreading from you to other patients and babies.

How will MRSA affect my hospital care?

If our records show that you have been colonized or infected with MRSA any time within the last 5 years, your healthcare providers will use "contact precautions" with you. This means:

- Anyone who enters your room must wash their hands when they enter and again before they leave. This includes both healthcare providers and visitors.
- Healthcare providers will wear gloves and a clean gown when they enter your room.
- Friends and family can choose if they want to wear gloves and a gown to protect themselves.
- If you have an active infection, you may be asked to stay in your hospital room and not visit another area of the hospital.

Will MRSA affect my new baby?

If you are colonized or infected with MRSA, healthcare providers will also use "contact precautions" with your baby. This means:

- All healthcare providers will wear clean gowns and gloves when working with your baby.
- Your baby will stay with you in your room. If you are critically ill and have to stay in another section of the hospital, your baby will be kept in a private area and will visit you when it is safe to do so.
- If your baby is in the nursery, he or she will be kept away from the other babies.
- Your baby will be treated for MRSA only if your baby has an *active* infection, such as a rash, a wound, or other infection.

What about my baby's visitors?

People who come to visit your baby must wash their hands when they enter the room and again when they leave. Visitors may choose if they want to wear gloves and a gown.

What if the baby is being adopted?

The birth mother will stay in her room in the hospital. The baby will stay in an area of the nursery away from other babies. The adoptive parents will be asked to wash their hands before and after visiting the baby. They may choose whether to wear protective gloves and gowns.

Can I breastfeed my baby?

Mother's milk is the best food for babies. MRSA does not spread through mother's milk, it spreads on the skin. If you do not have an active infection on your breast, you can breastfeed your baby. If you have a sore or rash on just one breast, you can breastfeed from the other breast. You can pump milk to relieve pressure on an infected breast and to help maintain your milk supply.

Does my baby's umbilical cord need special care?

Your baby's umbilical cord does not require special care, except for keeping it clean and dry. If there is any drainage around the cord, wipe it clean with a warm, wet washcloth and let it dry.

What should I watch out for?

Call your baby's doctor if you notice:

- Areas of redness, swelling, or tenderness on the skin or around the umbilical cord.
- Development of pus-filled blisters on the skin or around the umbilical cord.

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