



information

Information for **FAMILIES** of Infants Colonized with Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA)

What is MRSA?

Staphylococcus aureus, or *Staph*, is a common bacteria, often found on a person's skin or mucous membranes (like the lining of the nose or mouth). Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*, or MRSA, is a type of Staph that is not killed by the most commonly used antibiotics.

What does "MRSA colonization" mean?

MRSA colonization means that MRSA bacteria are present on a person's skin or mucous membranes but are not causing illness. Bacteria are naturally present in small amounts on all human bodies, including those of newborn infants. The types and amount of bacteria vary from one person to another and can change over time, but in general, bacteria on the skin are not harmful.

Could MRSA colonization cause a health problem for my baby?

While colonization itself is not harmful, if bacteria enter deeper skin layers or the body, they can cause an infection. An infection is a health problem which would need evaluation and treatment from your pediatrician.

What would an infection with MRSA look like?

MRSA infections are usually infections of the skin. They typically appear like a pimple or boil and can be red, swollen, and painful, or have pus or other drainage. Much less commonly, more serious infections can develop, such as pneumonia, blood stream infections, or bone infections. MRSA can be accompanied by fever and overall ill-appearance. If any of these signs occur in your baby, you should contact your pediatrician.



Does my baby need treatment for MRSA colonization?

Colonization does not require any treatment. While there is treatment which may get rid of colonization, including antibiotic ointment to the nose and special baths, it is not recommended in infants who are not experiencing infection. This is because exposure to those treatments may make the treatments ineffective later (the bacteria grow “resistant” to them as well), and then they could not be used if a real infection occurred. Additionally, research has shown that attempts to “decolonize” patients with these treatments may not be effective, and that patients may later become recolonized despite being treated.

Will my baby always have MRSA colonization?

Most healthy infants will clear MRSA from their skin over time. However, even if they do so it is possible for colonization to be acquired again.

How did my baby get MRSA colonization?

MRSA is spread from one person to another, usually on the hands. It is common in the community, so the source of your baby’s colonization could be a visitor, healthcare worker, or family member. As you may be aware, there have been several infants born at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center (BIDMC) in the past few months who have been found to be colonized or infected. We have determined the bacteria to be the most common type of “community-associated” MRSA, meaning the origin of the bacteria is most likely outside of BIDMC. Despite extensive investigation, however, we have been unable to determine how it has spread. Nonetheless, we have strengthened our staff efforts on hand hygiene and sterilization of equipment and rooms to try to minimize any risk of spread of MRSA colonization among our babies.

Can MRSA spread to other members of our family?

MRSA can be spread to other members of your family. MRSA is spread by skin-to-skin contact and can pass from your infant to parents and siblings. The best way to prevent this spread is good hand-washing or use of alcohol-based hand cleaners before and after each contact with your baby. Soap and water should be used after changing diapers, as soap is needed to remove any soilage from your hands. This is called “hand hygiene” and is a good practice to prevent spread of all infections, including colds and stomach illnesses, through a family.

What about playdates and interaction with other friends and family?

In general, there is no need to limit contact between your baby and any friends or family. As MRSA is increasingly common in the community, other people with whom your baby plays may or may not already be colonized themselves, usually without their knowledge. However, you should continue to use good hand hygiene during these activities. Your knowledge of your baby’s colonization status does not need to change his or her activities.

Who should I tell about my baby’s MRSA colonization?

Anyone who is providing clinical care to your infant should be told that he or she has had MRSA colonization. This information will guide evaluation and treatment of any infection. Otherwise, this is your personal health information to be shared or not as you wish.

What should I do if I have more questions?

Your pediatrician is the best person to ask. If necessary he or she could refer you to a pediatric infectious disease specialist.