Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA)

What is Staphylococcus aureus?

Staphylococcus is a common type of bacteria. The strain called S. aureus, is so common that it can be found on culture of the skin, nose or throat in 30-50% of healthy adults and children.

What is methicillin resistant Staphylococcus aureus?

Methicillin resistant S. aureus is commonly called MRSA. It refers to the common staphylococcus germ that has developed resistance to common antibiotics. Many children carry this bacterium but it is more common in children with skin disorders, those who have had recent surgery or antibiotic treatment, those with chronic conditions such as diabetes, or those children who are receiving kidney dialysis.

Can healthy children carry MRSA?

Healthy children can carry MRSA even if they have no risk factors such as skin disease, underlying antibiotic exposure or other underlying illness. Sometimes these healthy children will develop skin infection and antibiotic treatment might be necessary.

Why are hospitals concerned about MRSA?

Resistant bacteria from one child can spread to other children during routine hospital care. For this reason, special isolation procedures are used when the child is admitted to the hospital.

If a child has MRSA in the nose, what does this mean?

Everyone has normal bacteria present in the nose, mouth, and intestine, and on the skin. When MRSA is found in any of these places, it likely means the germ has become part of the child's normal bacteria.

How is MRSA detected?

A culture for bacteria will confirm the presence of the germ and special testing will determine if it is MRSA.

Can MRSA cause serious infection?

Staph germs can cause a variety of infections including skin infection, blood stream infection, bone or joint infections and heart infections. Appropriate antibiotics are available. There is no evidence that MRSA infections are more dangerous than Staph infections that are not related to resistant bacteria.
If my child has MRSA, is she considered contagious?

MRSA is spread by person to person contact. Patients infected or colonized with MRSA should be managed with "contact precautions" in the hospital. This means that gown and gloves will be used for patient contact. Your child will have a private room and will not be able to go to common areas such as playrooms. As long as your child’s test continues to show the germ, contact precautions will be needed. Ask your child’s doctor about doing follow up tests which may be able to show that the germ has gone away.

Is special isolation necessary when my child is at home?

No. Because this bacterium is increasingly found in healthy children, the American Academy of Pediatrics and Centers for Disease Control only focus on preventing transmission of this bacterium in the hospital setting. Good hand washing is always recommended.

What can be done to prevent MRSA?

The American Academy of Pediatrics and Centers for Disease Control have focused efforts on decreasing antibiotic use for conditions such as colds, bronchitis and routine ear infections. Experiences from other countries which have focused efforts to reduce antibiotic prescriptions for viral infections have shown that levels of bacterial resistance have begun to decrease.