

# The Safe Patient

An educational patient safety series with free downloadable brochures, a service of The Patient Channel and Safe Care Campaign, in cooperation with the CDC

## Staying Safe While in the Hospital: Preventing MRSA

Because antibiotics are frequently used in hospitals, the bacteria found there have become resistant to many of the most often used antibiotics. Recently, the staphylococcal bacteria, **a common bacterium known as staph**, have shown resistance to a wide range of antibiotics. Some staphylococci have developed a degree of resistance to antibiotics, including ones designed specifically to combat staph, such as Methicillin and other related penicillin antibiotics. These bacteria are referred to as Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus, MRSA for short. If misdiagnosed or left untreated, MRSA can cause serious problems.

- If you have a MRSA infection, your doctors need to know about it so they can select the right antibiotic. They can't use methicillin or related antibiotics that don't work. If they initially select an antibiotic that the staph are resistant to, it's like a delay of treatment; it's like waiting to give you the right drug. **But you can lower your risk of contracting any infection by making sure all care providers and visitors wash or sanitize their hands before and after visiting you. Everyone taking care of you needs to have clean hands. It doesn't matter if it's the physician or the nurse or the person carrying you to the x-ray suite. They all need to wash their hands before they touch you.**
- Also, **before you are examined by your doctors or nurses, ask them to sanitize their stethoscope properly. This prevents the spread of germs between patients.** Bacteria travel from patient to patient. They'll travel on a stethoscope, they'll travel on hands, they'll travel on gloves. **So don't be afraid to ask the doctor or nurse to wash their stethoscope off with an alcohol pad.**
- MRSA is a dangerous infection, but it can be prevented. **So speak up and remind the hospital staff about the importance of clean hands and instruments.**

