



MRSA Information for NICU Parents & Caregivers

What is MRSA?

- MRSA stands for methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*.
- MRSA is a particular type of *Staphylococcus aureus* that has developed resistance to an antibiotic called methicillin (Oxacillin) and some other commonly used antibiotics. “Resistance” means the germ is not killed by a particular antibiotic.
- Everyone carries germs on their skin, and these are mostly harmless. *Staphylococcus aureus* is a common kind of bacteria germ that is found on the skin and in the nose of about a third of healthy people.

Screening for MRSA:

- Premature babies have under-developed immune systems which makes them more vulnerable to infections of all kinds. NICU takes special care to monitor your baby closely for any signs of infections. Part of the NICU monitoring includes screening of all babies for MRSA colonization because so many people carry it on their skin without even knowing it.
- NICU regularly screens (tests) for MRSA colonization by taking swabs of your baby’s nose, groin, and/or belly button. The swabs are sent to the lab for processing and results are usually available within a couple of days.

How is “colonization” different from an “infection” with MRSA?

- Many bacteria live outside of the body on the skin which is called colonization. About a third of healthy children and adults are colonized with MRSA. Most of the time MRSA lives on the skin without causing any harm, but occasionally it can get into the body and cause harm which is infection. It is helpful for the NICU care team to find out if your baby is carrying MRSA to effectively provide care.

How is MRSA spread?

- Because MRSA is commonly found on the skin, it can be spread easily on the hands. For that reason staff caring closely for your baby wear disposable gloves and gowns, and clean their hands before and after giving care to your baby. It can also spread by contact with personal items such as phones, towels, clothes, or medical equipment.
The best way to prevent colonization and infection is to perform the handwashing scrub upon entry to NICU, and use the alcohol-based sanitizer immediately before contact with your baby. You will also need to wear an isolation gown when visiting your infant.



My Baby has a Positive MRSA Swab

My baby has a positive MRSA swab - what does that mean?

- NICU routinely swabs babies to detect MRSA colonization. The swab result shows that your baby is carrying MRSA. Your baby is unlikely to suffer harm because it is outside of the body on the skin. If your baby shows symptoms of developing an infection from MRSA inside the body, the NICU team will use a specific antibiotic.

How is “colonization” different from an “infection” with MRSA?

- Many bacteria live outside of the body on the skin which is called colonization. About a third of healthy children and adults are colonized with MRSA. Most of the time MRSA lives on the skin without causing any harm, but occasionally it can get into the body and cause harm which is infection. It is helpful for the NICU care team to find out if your baby is carrying MRSA to effectively provide care.

Will my baby be in the hospital longer?

- There is no need to delay your baby’s discharge from the hospital because of MRSA colonization.

How is MRSA spread?

- Because MRSA is commonly found on the skin, it can be spread easily through contact. For that reason your baby will be placed in contact precautions for the duration of their stay- staff caring closely for your baby wear disposable gloves and gowns, and clean their hands before and after giving care to your baby. It can also spread by contact with personal items such as phones, towels, clothes, or medical equipment. ***The best way to prevent colonization and infection is to perform the handwashing scrub upon entry to NICU, and use the alcohol-based sanitizer immediately before contact with your baby. An isolation gown will also need to be worn.***

Can I still do skin to skin kangaroo care with my baby?

- Yes! Skin to skin kangaroo care may be done. The value of this activity with your NICU baby outweighs the risks of transmitting MRSA (Exception if the parent or caregiver has active MRSA mastitis or draining wounds/lesions on the chest.)

I have twins/multiples in NICU - now what?

- While in the NICU visit the MRSA negative infant(s) first, and then the MRSA positive infant(s). This is especially important if doing skin to skin time in the NICU. ***Washing hands and using the alcohol based hand sanitizer before and after contact with each baby is essential. You will need to change your isolation gown between infants. If you have an infant that does not have MRSA, visitation with that infant should take place first.***