

# FACT SHEET

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## METHICILLIN-RESISTANT STAPHYLOCOCCUS AUREUS (MRSA)

- Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) is a type of staphylococcus (“staph”) bacteria that is resistant to many antibiotics.
- MRSA, like all staph bacteria, can be spread from person to person through casual contact or via contaminated objects or surfaces. It is most commonly spread via hand contact.
- MRSA is acquired in health care settings and more recently in some community settings. The bacteria can be found in the nose, around the rectum and on some skin surfaces such as the armpit and groins. Most people are not aware they are carrying the bacteria and their health is not affected. When MRSA enters broken skin, a skin infection or boil can develop. Pneumonia and severe bloodstream infections have been reported as well.
- The presence of MRSA in the community and in health care settings is not new. VIHA facilities, like facilities around the world, have seen a steady increase in both the number of cases and the severity of infections.
- It is perhaps a common misperception in the public that MRSA is spread from hospitals to the community. In fact, most MRSA experienced in VIHA health care facilities is brought in by patients from the community. This is not surprising as our hospitals reflect our communities, and if a disease is increasing in the community, it can be expected it would also increase in the hospitals.
- Tracking the number of MRSA cases in the community is difficult because it is not a disease that Public Health keeps track of, such as measles or tuberculosis.
- VIHA does monitor and track the number of MRSA cases in our hospitals. The origin of the infection (hospital-acquired or community acquired) is also tracked.
- In 2005/06, there were 842 new cases of MRSA identified in VIHA:
  - Victoria/Sidney area            569 cases (209-hospital, 360-community)
  - Duncan area                        58 cases (25-hospital, 31-community)
  - Nanaimo area                        123 cases (32-hospital, 91-community)
  - Campbell River area            92 cases (9-hospital, 83 community)

- A top priority for VIHA is to limit the number of new MRSA cases occurring in the hospital, and prevent its spread to other patients when cases are identified.
- The most important prevention mechanism to prevent transmission of MRSA is hand washing - particularly by health care providers including doctors and nurses.
- Infection control procedures are used to contain MRSA cases identified in VIHA facilities. These include:
  - Regularly screening and testing patients.
  - Isolating inpatients who are infected with MRSA and adding enhanced precautions for patients with MRSA in outpatient settings.
  - Using barrier precautions such as wearing medical gloves and gowns when providing care.
  - Restricting areas where patients can go within the hospital if they are MRSA positive.
  - Enhancing cleaning of wards, equipment and rooms, including 'terminal cleans' when a patient known to have had MRSA is discharged.
  - Closing an affected ward to new patient admissions if warranted.
- More information about MRSA is available at <http://www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/hfile73.stm>