

5. METHICILLIN-RESISTANT STAPHYLOCOCCUS AUREUS (MRSA)

Date: _____

Dear Parent or Guardian,

What is MRSA?

Staphylococcus aureus is a type of bacteria (germ) that is often found on the skin and in the nose of healthy people. Most people who carry staphylococcus on their skin or in their nose (about one in three people) will not suffer any ill effects. People who carry these bacteria on their skin or in their nose without showing any signs or symptoms of infection are described as being "colonised".

Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) is a specific type of staphylococcus that no longer responds to many commonly used antibiotics such as penicillin.

Occasionally these bacteria cause infections (e.g. impetigo, boils, abscesses or infected wounds) if they enter the body through a break in the skin due to a cut, sore or surgical incision. This is most likely to occur in people who are already ill. A few people however, may develop more serious infections such as septicaemia, also known as a 'bloodstream infection', especially people who are already ill in hospital or who have long term health problems.

How is *Staphylococcus aureus* (including MRSA) spread?

Staphylococci (including MRSA) are usually spread from person to person on unwashed hands, particularly after having direct contact with a draining wound (e.g. cut or sore), but it can also be spread by touching items used by an infected person e.g. soiled dressings.

Should children with *Staphylococcus aureus* (including MRSA) be excluded from school?

Children known to carry *Staphylococcus aureus* (including MRSA) on the skin or in the nose do not need to be excluded from school.

Children who have draining wounds or skin sores producing pus will only need to be excluded from school if the wounds cannot be covered or contained by a dressing and/or the dressing cannot be kept dry and intact.

How can you prevent spread?

The main ways to prevent infection are to wash your hands and care for wounds properly.

- Hand washing with soap and running water is the most effective way to prevent the spread of infection.
- Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered until healed; watch for signs of infection, such as pus, redness, warmth and swelling.
- Do not share personal items e.g. towels, facecloths, flannels, bedding and clothes.
- Cover infected wounds with clean dressings.
- If a dressing needs to be changed in school, gloves should be worn by the care giver and hands should be washed before and after changing the dressing.
- Discard soiled items (e.g. dressings) in a sealed plastic bag before placing it in a domestic waste bin.

Useful information on MRSA can be found at <http://www.hpsc.ie/hpsc/A-Z/MicrobiologyAntimicrobialResistance/EuropeanAntimicrobialResistanceSurveillanceSystemEARSS/ReferenceandEducationalResourceMaterial/SaureusMRSA/>