Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA) - Frequently Asked Questions

What is MRSA?
Staphylococcus aureus is a bacteria that periodically lives on the skin and mucous membranes of healthy people. Occasional it can develop a resistance to certain antibiotics causing an infection. This is called Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus aureus or MRSA. MRSA is spread from one person to another by contact, usually on hands in contact with contaminated material by an infected person. MRSA can survive well on hands and can survive for weeks on inanimate objects such as door handles etc.

Who is at risk of contracting MRSA?
Risk factors for MRSA infections include invasive procedures, prior treatment with antibiotics, prolonged hospital stay, stay in an intensive care unit, surgical wound infection and close proximity to someone who is carrying MRSA.

How is MRSA spread?
MRSA is spread from one person to another by contact, usually on the hands of caregivers. MRSA can be present on the health care provider's hands either from touching contaminated material from infected persons or from touching articles contaminated by a person carrying MRSA, such as towels, sheets and wound dressings. MRSA can live on hands and objects in the environment for extended periods of time.

Can someone die from MRSA?
Most people do not die if they are infected with MRSA, however in severe cases of MRSA bacteremia, death can occur. This is uncommon and tends to occur in those people with other severe health problems. The vast majority of people recover from MRSA, once their health is restored.

What preventative measures can be taken?
Health care providers and visitors should always practice good hand hygiene before and after patient contact. If a patient is known to have or had MRSA in the past additional infection control precautions are initiated. Single room accommodation will be provided for people with MRSA infection.

What is the treatment for MRSA?
If a patient is carrying MRSA, generally no treatment is necessary, as the organism is not causing an illness and often will be cleared on its own when the person's health is restored. If it is determined that the patient is infected (they have a blood infection, skin infection or wound infection etc.) then the patient will treated with the appropriate antibiotic as determined by a physician.