



The Bright & Beautiful Therapy
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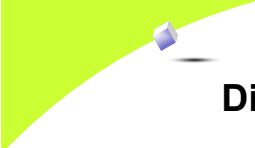
The Bright & Beautiful
Therapy Dogs, Inc.

Guidelines for Disease Control (including MRSA) For our Therapy Dogs



- MRSA:
Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus
Aureus bacteria

**(Drug-Resistant Staph
Infections)**



Disease Control and Drug-Resistant Staph Infections (MRSA) and Therapy Dogs. Yes, they can co-exist!

MRSA? What is it?

Staphylococcus Aureus bacteria is a bacteria that is commonly carried by people on their skin or in their noses. It is estimated that about 30% of people carry this bacteria and don't even know it. When Staphylococcus Aureus does cause an infection by entering the body through a wound, it responds rapidly to antibiotics.

MRSA is Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus. This is a bacteria that has developed a resistance to most commonly used antibiotics (likely due to over usage of antibiotics and disinfectants). Infections by MRSA can be superficial - like skin infections that don't heal, or invasive - like pneumonias, blood born infections, and flesh eating infections. It is currently estimated that up to 1% of people in the United States are carriers of MRSA, without being sick from the bacteria. Some of our pets may be carriers too, again without showing any symptoms.

Complications from MRSA are extremely rare, particularly in healthy individuals (including pregnant women, babies and children). Some individuals... think poor immune systems, frail and elderly, those with dialysis, catheters, open wounds or devices that pierce the skin into the body... are at risk of infection - but only if the bacteria enters inappropriate sites. This is a problem because the bacteria is resistant to many (but not all) types of antibiotics; so it is difficult (but not impossible) to treat.

Karen Dashfield, DVM

June Golden, Executive Director

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- A dog cultured positive for MRSA should not make therapy visits until confirmed to be MRSA free by a veterinarian.
- If any person residing with the therapy dog has MRSA, the dog should not make therapy visits until the person is declared MRSA free by their physician, and the dog has been properly bathed with an antibacterial shampoo.
- Do not allow Therapy Dogs to lick patients in the facilities. Teach your dog to “lick” so then you can teach “NO Lick” - Practice at home!!!!!!!
- Recurrent and serious infections in yourself or your dog should be tested for MRSA..
- Bright & Beautiful Therapy dog teams should NEVER visit multiple facilities in a single day to prevent the possible spread of germs from one facility to the other by either the handler or the dog.
- Always bathe your dog after a therapy visit to a known or likely MRSA facility, and between facility visits. Remember to wash your clothes, and your equipment (including leash and collar) between visits also.



REMEMBER MRSA in dogs is very rare, and the risk of transfer between humans and animals is not fully understood, but it is better to be safe than sorry.

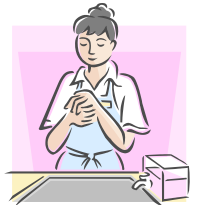
Why do I need to worry about this?

MRSA is a Zoonotic disease. That means it can be transmitted from human to canine and canine to human. We want our therapy dogs to be helpful and promote healing, not start an epidemic or become sick themselves.

If your dog is experiencing a skin lesion that is not resolving, talk to your veterinarian about having the wound cultured to rule out MRSA. Keep in mind that in rare instances, your dog can be asymptomatic (show no symptoms) and still be a carrier of MRSA.

If you have a pimple or insect bite that becomes infected or produces pus and/or drains, keep it covered with a dry bandage until it heals – if it doesn't heal - have it checked by your doctor!

Remember the reason the strain is resistant to antibiotics and is hard to treat is because of all that antibacterial stuff we've been using - so it won't work now! Wash your hands with hot soapy water frequently and vigorously (at least 15 seconds!) or use a hand sanitizer with at least 62% alcohol in the formula.



Try not to touch your eyes, nose, broken skin, or mouth if you're infected - these are the preferred routes of transmission. You can infect others and give it to your dog too!

If you have been diagnosed as having MRSA, know that your pet is susceptible and tell your veterinarian if he/she shows signs of illness (and vice versa).

Now what?

It's simple. Use common sense. No need to panic. The guidelines for MRSA are just good basic disease control guidelines that will help to prevent you and your canine from spreading infections of any sort through a facility. Who wants to spread even the flu, common cold, or GI virus through a facility or carry it home?

Bright & Beautiful Therapy Dogs, Inc. Guidelines for Disease Control (including MRSA) :

- Bathe your therapy dog no more than 24 hours prior to the visit to ensure your dog is "clean". Any good antibacterial shampoo is fine; the actual mechanical washing is the most important.
- Carry hand sanitizer and request that anyone petting your dog sanitize their hands first .

(REMEMBER THIS INCLUDES DOCTORS, NURSES
AND
OTHER STAFF MEMBERS!!)

The hand sanitizer must contain at least 62% alcohol in formula. The mechanics of rubbing in the sanitizer or washing your hands for at least 15 seconds is equally important.

If the facility has a rule against the use of the hand sanitizer that you are carrying, then the facility must make arrangements to have all persons who will interact with your dog wash their hands properly prior to handling your dog.

- Remember that security guard who loves your dog? If he/she cannot effectively sanitize their hands – it has to be hands off for now!
- Use a thin sheet to place on a bed or chair for visitation. After visiting each patient, use a clean one between dog and surface. Place each used sheet in a sealed bag for laundering in hot water and hot dryer after every visit to a facility. Better yet, use disposable bed pads that can be thrown away after each room. Many facilities have offered to provide them for us.

- Sanitize your hands regularly in the facility, especially between each visitation location, room or patient and immediately after leaving the facility to avoid spreading MRSA.
- Bathe the therapy dog after returning from a facility visit to ensure that the dog is "clean" to return to your family. If your dog is a breed (or breeds) whose coat makes this prohibitive, wash them well with a hot washcloth and antibacterial soap with lots of scrubbing before entering the house.
- Wash your hands well and consider a shower after returning from a care facility. Take your shoes off outside and disinfect them. Remember any leash, towel, backpack, vest or purse and clothing you bring/wear must be cleaned and disinfected too. So travel light and use fabrics that can be washed in hot water and dried in a hot dryer.
- Call your facility before your visit to see if there are patients diagnosed with MRSA. If they have positive cases of MRSA, consider not visiting. Let us know if you cancel your visit! Keep in mind that national estimates are that 5% of hospitals and nursing homes have MRSA.
- Do not make therapy visits with a dog with any skin infections, open sore or wound - both for the dog's safety, your safety and the patients' safety.
- Make sure any cuts, sores or skin infections you, the handler has are covered completely. If you have MRSA you may not visit until you are cleared by your doctor.
- Therapy dogs should not interact with patients known or suspected of having MRSA. If there are patients with unresolved skin lesions, don't allow your pet to interact with them.