Your physician has notified you of being positive for MRSA in your nose. Why was I tested and what does that mean?

A new California law requires testing of certain patients within 24 hours of admission for MRSA so that information can be provided to prevent the spread to others. Staphylococcus aureus (pronounced staff-ill-oh-KOK-us-AW-ree-us) or "staph" is a common germ that about 1 out of every 3 people has on their skin or in their nose. This germ does not cause any problems for most people who have it on their skin. MRSA is a form of this germ that cannot be treated with the drugs most commonly used to treat staph infections.

What does the result of this test mean?

If the test is positive, it means that at the moment your nose was swabbed, MRSA was present. You are considered "colonized" with MRSA, or a carrier. If the test is negative, it means that you are not "colonized" with MRSA.

What is infection vs. colonization?

An infection means that germs are in or on the body and make you sick which results in signs and symptoms such as fever, pus from a wound, or pneumonia. Your doctor will give you a treatment of some kind for the infection. If you are only colonized, you are not sick and no treatment is necessary.

How did I get MRSA?

Anyone can get MRSA. You can get MRSA the same way you can get a cold, such as by touching someone or something that has the bacteria on it and then touching your eyes or your nose. **Washing your hands often** reduces your chances of getting MRSA. You may increase your chances of getting MRSA if:

- You take antibiotics a lot
- You take antibiotics without a prescription
- You don't follow directions when taking antibiotics, such as stopping early or missing doses

If I have MRSA, do I need to do anything special when I go to a clinic or hospital?

If you've ever had an MRSA infection, or you are a carrier, tell all of your health care providers. As always, they will wash their hands or use gel and may wear gloves when caring for you. They may also wear a gown, if needed. If you do not see your providers clean their hands; please ask them to do so. If you are admitted to a hospital or a nursing home, you may be placed on "Contact Precautions" or in a private room if you have an infection. Your health care provider will determine the best plan of care for your treatment.

How do I stop MRSA from spreading?

At home, in most cases, you need to focus the most on good hand washing. Actions that can help prevent the spread of MRSA and other skin infections include:

- Wash your hands often throughout the day with soap and water. Rub your hands for 15 – 30 seconds each time. Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water aren't available.
- If you have a sore, don't touch it with bare hands. Wear gloves when changing the bandage and throw away the used bandage right away
- Do not share personal items like towels, razors or makeup
- Disinfect all gym or sports equipment after using it
- Keep your cuts and scrapes clean and cover them with bandages
- Do not touch other people's cuts or bandages
- Wash linens and clothes with warm water and bleach (if possible) and dry in a hot dryer

Where can I get more information?

- Ask your health care provider
- Look at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) website: www.cdc.gov