One of your tests (cultures) shows that you are carrying a germ called MRSA (Methicillin resistant Staphylococcus aureus). Staff must now take special precautions when taking care of you. This information sheet may help you understand what MRSA is and why special precautions are required.

What is an antibiotic resistant germ? - When someone has an infection, antibiotics are medicines that are used to kill the germ (bacteria) causing the infection. An antibiotic resistant germ is not killed by the usual antibiotics. If an antibiotic resistant germ causes an infection, then a stronger drug must be used.

What is Staphylococcus aureus? - Staphylococcus aureus is a bacterium that lives on the skin and in the noses of about 25% of us. This is called colonization, and occurs with other bacteria all over our bodies. It does not normally cause a problem. However, Staphylococcus aureus can cause infections such as boils and abscesses. In the hospital, it can cause more serious infections in those patients who are already ill.

What is MRSA? - The usual drug (antibiotic) used to treat infections caused by Staphylococcus aureus was a penicillin-like antibiotic called Methicillin. Unfortunately, some Staphylococcus aureus are no longer killed by Methicillin and are called Methicillin resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA). When this happens a stronger antibiotic must be used if a person has an infection. The antibiotic usually used is called vancomycin.

How did I get MRSA? - MRSA has been found in the community and the hospital setting on persons and their surroundings. It is mainly spread by contact with unwashed hands or gloves.

Why are special precautions needed? - Special precautions are needed in order to prevent the spread of the germ to other patients in the hospital who are also ill and, therefore, most likely to develop an infection.

What will be different? - Infection Control staff will decide if you need to stay in your room. If you are asked to stay in your room, Infection Control will advise your healthcare provider when and how often you can leave your room.
- Visitors are allowed to visit, but should wash their hands well on entering and leaving your room, and then should not visit other patients in the hospital.
- You will be taught to wash your hands with a skin antiseptic. You must wash your hands after using the toilet and every time before leaving your room.
- Avoid rubbing your nose or touching open sores.
- Signs will be placed outside the room to remind everyone about the special precautions.

- It is very important for all staff and visitors to wash their hands when they come in and when they leave your room. Don't be shy about reminding everyone.
- Infection Control will decide if people taking care of you need to wear gowns and gloves. In some cases they may also wear masks.
- Your room may be specially cleaned to remove the MRSA germs.
- In some cases the equipment used in your daily care will remain in your room.

What will happen when I leave Hospital or am transferred to Rehab, TCU/Chronic Units? - If you go to another healthcare facility or if you have services in your home, some precautions may be needed. This is to prevent your caregivers from picking up the germ and spreading it to other patients. If you are transferred to Rehab, TCU/Chronic Unit you will be allowed to join in group activities as much as possible. You will be required to practice good personal hygiene. Good handwashing is very important to reduce the risk of spread.

What about at home? - MRSA is no more dangerous than other normal bacteria that people carry on their skin and are exposed to every day. Carry on with your usual activities and remind everyone to wash their hands often. You should wash your hands after you go to the bathroom or touch your nose or a wound as a matter of routine, not just for MRSA.

Will this go away? - It might go away on its own, but your doctor and Infection Control personnel may order a special antibiotic cream to be put into your nose and on any wounds you might have. If prescribed, the cream should be used three times a day for a week to ten days. It is important that you apply this cream as prescribed for the recommended number of days. You may be asked to wash your body with a special skin antiseptic. This may help to get rid of the MRSA faster. If you have an infection your doctor may order an antibiotic (e.g. vancomycin). After you finish your treatment, cultures will be taken from certain parts of your body. If they do not show MRSA, Infection Control staff may stop isolation.

How can I help? - If you go to another hospital or doctor, please tell your doctor, nurse or other care-giver that you were once on special precautions for MRSA. This will allow them to check your status and use precautions to make sure they do not carry the organism to other patients.

What if I am admitted again? - On any future admissions you may be placed in a single room and special precautions may be taken. Swabs from certain parts of your body will be taken to ensure there is no MRSA. Even if special precautions are not needed at that time, you may be kept in a private room and checked regularly to make sure you do not have MRSA.

If you need more information, contact the Infection Control Department: O.T.M.H. (905) 845-2571; MDH (905) 878-2383