



## Modernize WA's MRSA Law to Advance Hospitals' Infection Prevention Work

### Background

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Washington State's current law to prevent the spread of *methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) in hospitals needs to be updated to increase patient and staff safety. The legislature passed the law in 2009 based on available information. Today, infectious disease scientists' understanding of MRSA is more comprehensive and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has identified additional dangerous pathogens. Washington's MRSA law overcommits hospital resources and attention to one pathogen, which consumes staff time and testing supplies, and limits hospital space without meaningfully increasing patient and staff safety. Gov. Inslee waived the law in March 2020 to provide hospitals more flexibility to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The waiver remains in effect and allows hospitals to prepare and respond to dangerous pathogens like COVID-19 without the MRSA law's specific requirements.

### WSHA Position

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The flexibility provided to hospitals by the MRSA law's current waiver should continue by modernizing RCW 70.41.430 to address dangerous pathogens of epidemiological concern. WSHA's proposal requires hospitals to develop a policy to prevent and control the transmission of pathogens based on a risk assessment and evidence-based intervention strategies. The proposal also aligns data reporting requirements with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services' (CMS) requirements to ensure laboratory-confirmed pathogen cases are submitted to the CDC's National Health and Safety Network when required by CMS.

### Key Messages

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- Shifting from a narrow risk assessment for MRSA to a broad risk assessment for pathogens of epidemiological concern will ensure hospitals include certain pathogens deemed as "urgent threats" by the CDC and emerging pathogens like COVID-19 in their infection control work. This will ensure hospitals' readiness for outbreaks and epidemics.
- Modernizing the MRSA law will require hospitals to use appropriate evidence-based practices to prevent and control dangerous pathogens. Depending on the pathogen, interventions to ensure patient and staff safety may include patient testing, education, isolation and cohorting.
- Aligning the data reporting obligation with CMS requirements ensures hospitals are reporting laboratory-confirmed pathogen cases. This will provide useful data for infection prevention professionals and researchers working to address pathogens.
- Modernizing the MRSA law was developed by a workgroup of leaders from Washington's Puget Sound Chapter of the Association of Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology, infectious disease doctors, nurses and other health care professionals.

### Contact Information

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