

Information Leaflet on MRSA for Patients, Relatives and Carers

What is MRSA and how does it affect patients and the people around them – family and friends, nurses, doctors, and other patients?

What does MRSA stand for?

MRSA stands for “**M**ethicillin-**R**esistant *Staphylococcus aureus*”.

What is MRSA?

MRSA is a type of bacteria that usually lives harmlessly on the skin. However, if it gets inside the body, it can cause a serious infection that needs immediate treatment with antibiotics.

People who have MRSA on their skin and/or in their nose are unharmed by it. This is called being *colonised*.

When the organism enters the body through wounds, injuries, etc. a person might become *infected*.

How does MRSA spread?

MRSA usually lives harmlessly on the skin and mainly spreads through touch. This can happen if you touch a person with MRSA, or something they’ve touched. MRSA will only cause an infection if it spreads inside the body.

How can you tell if someone has MRSA?

You can only tell if someone has MRSA by taking swabs or samples. Your doctor or nurse will take a swab from your nose, groin and/or skin wounds/ulcers, or take a sample of urine or sputum. These will then be sent to the laboratory to be tested.

If the laboratory grows MRSA from these samples, more tests may be carried out. The results of these tests will be used for the doctor to decide what treatment(s) should be made available to you.

Can MRSA be treated?

Yes. MRSA responds to some drugs and treatments, depending on how widespread the infection is. Although it is true that MRSA is a strain of bacteria that is not killed by some of the common antibiotics, doctors can use other antibiotics to clear up the infection.

If your skin or nose is found to be colonised with MRSA, your doctor will treat you with a special nasal cream or spray, antimicrobial body wash and shampoo for around 5 to 10 days.

Superficial infections can be treated with antibiotic creams but if the infection is more significant you might be treated with antibiotic tablets or drugs through a drip.

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Does MRSA change the way that you look after me?

Yes, but only in hospital as there are other vulnerable patients around. It is possible that you will be placed in a single room in hospital and staff will wear some personal protective equipment (e.g., gloves and apron) when they are caring for you. This precaution is taken to prevent the spread of MRSA within the hospital.

Can I have visitors in hospital?

Yes. MRSA does not normally harm healthy people, including pregnant women, children, and babies. However, visitors should ensure that they wear some personal protective equipment (e.g. gloves and apron), they clean their hands with soap and water or hand sanitiser before and after visiting and should not use the equipment or sit on the patient bed. Staff will provide guidance on any precautions required.

If someone with long-term health problems would like to visit you, please ask the nursing staff before-hand.

Will I have to stay in hospital longer?

Most patients who are colonised with MRSA do not usually have a longer stay in hospital but if you have an infection, you may have to stay in hospital until it shows signs of clearing up.

Will I need treatment at home?

If you are colonised with MRSA, you might be prescribed special nasal cream or spray, antimicrobial body wash and shampoo, particularly if you are likely to be re-admitted to hospital.

You might need to continue using treatments at home following a hospital stay. A district or practice nurse might be booked to re-dress any wounds you may have.

Will it be safe for my family?

Yes. MRSA only poses a risk if someone is already unwell or has a urinary catheter or other permanent tube in place. MRSA does not usually cause harm to fit and healthy people.

You need to ensure that you are particularly careful about washing your hands and ensure that you do not share towels, flannels, sponges etc.

Prevention

When you are in hospital, you can reduce the risk of infection by taking precautions such as:

- Keeping your hands and body clean. You can take soap and moist wipes with you, as well as your own razor.
- Always washing your hands after using the toilet or commode (hand wipes are available at the Norfolk & Norwich University Hospital for patients unable to get to the hand wash sinks).
- Always wash your hands or clean them with a hand wipe immediately before eating.
- Making sure your bed area is regularly cleaned and report any unclean toilet or bathroom facilities to a member of staff.
- If you are concerned about hygiene, don't be afraid to ask the doctor or nurse treating you if they have washed their hands.

REMEMBER: If you have MRSA or have been in contact with it, you should always tell any clinical staff treating you as soon as possible.

For more information, please contact your hospital doctor or nurse, GP practice or Community based Infection Prevention & Control Team.

