

Meticillin resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) Screening – What to expect

Q What is MRSA?

- A MRSA is a type of bacteria that's resistant to several widely used antibiotics. This means infections with MRSA can be harder to treat than other bacterial infections. The full name of MRSA is methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus. MRSA lives harmlessly on the skin of around 1 in 30 people, usually in the nose, armpits, groin or buttocks. This is known as "colonisation" or "carrying" MRSA (NHS, 2020). However, MRSA can cause problems in hospitals with complicated treatments, operations and indwelling devices providing opportunity for germs to enter the body with a potential to cause infection. The rate of MRSA per 100,000 population, per year has fallen from 8.6 in 2007/08 to 1.5 in 2015/16 (PHE, 2016).

Q Why am I being screened for MRSA?

- A Around 1 in 3 people admitted to hospital carry MRSA on their skin or in their nose (NHS, 2020). If we find you are carrying MRSA before you go into hospital you can use treatment to eliminate as much of it as possible. This means that the chances of you getting an MRSA infection, or passing MRSA on to another patient, are much smaller.

Q When and where will I be screened for MRSA?

- A If your admission is elective / planned, you will usually be screened before you come into hospital for your operation. This may be in a pre-admission assessment clinic, an outpatient clinic, sometimes at your GP surgery or on admission. Typically, a nurse will take the swabs as part of the other checks leading up to your hospital stay like your blood pressure and blood test. If your admission is unplanned, you will be screened in hospital as above.

How will I be screened for MRSA?

- A We can find out if you are carrying MRSA by taking a sample, using a swab in your nose or on your skin. Swabs may be taken from different sites, such as the inside of your nose, armpit or groin. Wounds, sputum and urine may also be screened. A swab is a cotton bud which is placed on the area of skin to be tested (such as in your nostrils). The test is painless and only takes a few seconds.

Q When will I get the results from the swabs?

Your swabs will be sent to a laboratory, which tests them for MRSA. The results usually take between 3-5 days but may be sooner. You will not normally be informed unless the result is positive to MRSA.

What happens after I have been screened?

If you are found to be carrying MRSA on your skin or in your nose a member of staff will inform you if you are an inpatient at the time of the result. If you have been discharged home your GP will be informed of new MRSA results. Do not worry. Carrying MRSA does not make you ill and you are not a risk to healthy people. This includes older people, pregnant women, children, and babies.

Q What is the treatment?

- A MRSA is a type of micro-organism that has become resistant to a group of antibiotics called meticillin but doctors can still treat MRSA infections with some other types of antibiotics. You will usually need to use a special body and hair wash and special cream in your nose before you come into hospital for your operation or procedure.

If you are not carrying MRSA you are unlikely to be contacted and should continue with your planned hospital care.

Remember, if you are worried about MRSA talk to your local NHS clinic nurse, your GP or Practise Nurse, or look on the NHS Choices website www.nhs.uk where you can find out more about MRSA.

References

[MRSA - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk) (2020)

Public Health England (2016) Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA and MSSA) bacteraemia mandatory reports 2015/16. PHE:London

