

MRSA

Information for Patients, Relatives and Visitors

What is MRSA?

MRSA stands for Meticillin (M) Resistant (R) *Staphylococcus* (S) *Aureus* (A). It is called this because it is resistant to a type of penicillin (an antibiotic) and some other antibiotics that are commonly used to treat infections.

Staphylococcus aureus lives harmlessly on the skin and in the nostrils of about 1 in 3 healthy people. It can cause harm if it enters the body via cuts and sores. Usually people who carry the MRSA do not require treatment. A few people may suffer from boils or wound infections because of the bacteria but the infection is usually easily treated with antiseptics or simple antibiotics.

MRSA is no more likely to cause infection than ordinary *Staphylococcus aureus* but if it does different antibiotics will be used to treat the symptoms.

How do you know if you have MRSA?

People who have MRSA do not look or feel any different from others. Patients with infection may develop signs and symptoms such as fever or infected wounds may become red and sore or develop pus. A person is found to have MRSA when the bacterium is detected from a swab or other specimen taken from the person.

Where is MRSA found?

MRSA can be found anywhere on your body but most commonly in the nose, perineum and throat. It may also be found in areas of damaged skin such as cuts, surgical wounds, burns and leg ulcers. This is why we swab these sites when patients are tested for MRSA.

How does a person get MRSA?

Sometimes it is impossible to know where a person acquired MRSA, because it can be found in the community as well as in hospitals. However, we do know that it can be acquired by contact with another person with MRSA or their surroundings. This is why the importance of good hand washing practices are emphasised for staff, visitors and patients.

Why is MRSA a concern in hospitals?

People who are admitted to hospital may be at a greater risk of developing any infection. MRSA and other germs cause problems in hospitals. This means extra precautions need to be taken to protect patients from acquiring bacteria such as MRSA. As well as simple hygiene measures cleaning your hands with soap and water, or hand sanitizer (alcohol hand gel).

What precautions are taken to prevent other patients acquiring MRSA?

Patients with MRSA may be moved to a room on their own, in order to prevent MRSA from spreading to other patients. Staff will always wear gloves and aprons when caring for people who have MRSA.

Can it be treated (eradicated)?

If you have MRSA on your skin, in your nose or throat you **may** receive treatment in the form of antiseptic body and hair wash, antibiotic nasal cream and throat spray. This process is called 'eradication'. The need for this will be discussed on an individual basis.

If you have a wound infection or infection of any other kind with MRSA you may be treated with antibiotics. Treatment is usually successful but in some patients MRSA can persist, or can return again weeks or months later. This should not delay discharge or affect everyday life. Most patients who are colonised with MRSA do not usually have to stay any longer in hospital than they would do normally

What effect could there be on family and friends?

MRSA does not harm healthy people, pregnant women, children OR babies. MRSA may affect people who have serious health problems and people with who have a skin condition or open wounds. If in doubt about whether a person with health problems should visit a patient with MRSA, ask the nurse in charge of the ward before visiting.

We do not ask visitors to wear gloves and aprons when visiting a patient with MRSA but we do ask them to wash their hands with soap and water before and after visiting. Visitors can also reduce the spread of MRSA by sitting on a visitor chair and not the patients chair or bed.

For further information please refer to our 'Visitor Information Leaflet'.

Precautions on discharge

There is no need for a person with MRSA to avoid contact with other people, including children of any age after leaving hospital, or stop any previous hobbies or interests. Your General Practitioner [GP] and other health professional (as necessary) will be told if you have MRSA as this may influence future treatment.

Precautions taken on re-admission to hospital

If you have had MRSA and are re-admitted to any hospital you (or a relative) should tell the nursing/medical staff. You may be nursed in a single room, isolated, and specimens taken to check if you still have MRSA.

Further information

If you would like any further information, or have specific questions about MRSA please ask the Ward or Department staff. The Infection Prevention and Control Team are always happy to talk to patients, relatives or carers who have particular concerns about MRSA.

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) can offer on-the-spot advice and information about the NHS. You can contact them on freephone 0800 032 02 02 or e-mail

northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk

Useful websites

If you would like further information about health conditions and treatment options, you may wish to have a look at the NHS Choices website at www.nhs.uk. On this website there is an information prescription generator www.nhs.uk/ips which brings together a wealth of approved patient information from the NHS and charity partners which you may find helpful.