



A patient's guide to

MRSA

- Methicillin Resistant
Staphylococcus Aureus

What is MRSA?

There are lots of micro-organisms (germs) on our skin. They are in the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the food we eat. Most of them are harmless, some are beneficial and a very small proportion can potentially cause harm. Staphylococcus aureus is a common germ that is found on the Skin (as a normal skin flora) and in the nostrils of about a third of healthy people.

There are other types of bacteria in the Staphylococcus family, and we all carry at least one of these types on our skin at times, or throughout our lives.

It can cause harm if it enters the body, for example through cuts and sores. Methicillin is a type of penicillin, an antibiotic that is used to treat infections. MRSA are types of Staphylococcus aureus that have developed resistance to methicillin and some other antibiotics used to treat common infections.

Some people carry MRSA on their skin or in their nostrils quite harmlessly. Some people carry MRSA for just a few hours or days, but other people carry MRSA for weeks or months. They may not be aware of being an MRSA carrier because they have no symptoms and it does not harm them - this is called 'colonisation'.

MRSA and other germs cause problems in hospitals. Complicated medical treatments, including operations and intravenous lines (drips), provide opportunities for germs to enter the body. MRSA and other types of *Staphylococcus aureus* can cause local skin infections such as boils and, in more vulnerable patients, they can cause more serious infections in wounds, bones, lungs and bloodstream infections that will require treatment. The following make patients vulnerable to infections:

- Their underlying medical condition
- The number of operations they have had
- The presence of open wounds
- How frequently they use antibiotics

What is the difference between colonisation and Infection with MRSA?

MRSA colonisation means that the bacteria is simply sitting on the skin (in any site) but is causing no harm to the person. MRSA infection means the bacteria are causing signs of infection, for example, fever and/or pus discharging from a wound. These patients will usually be given appropriate treatment for the infection.

How do you know if someone has MRSA?

People who carry MRSA do not look or feel different from anyone else. The MRSA does not harm them and they have no symptoms of infection. When patients come into hospital, a nurse may take swabs for laboratory tests to check for MRSA.

Patients who have an infection may develop signs and symptoms, such as a high temperature or a fever. An infected wound may become red and sore and discharge pus. Many different germs can cause these signs and symptoms. Only laboratory tests can show whether MRSA or other germs are the cause of this infection.

How does RNOH care for patients with MRSA?

The RNOH takes MRSA very seriously. All patients being prepared for or admitted for surgical procedures in RNOH are routinely tested by taking swabs from different parts of the patient's body (mainly from nose, groin, wound or device sites) to check if MRSA is present and to ensure that others are protected from the infection. Patients found to have MRSA are treated and their care discussed to ensure that they can still have surgery or investigations even with MRSA.

MRSA positive Patients are usually treated with antiseptic shampoo, body wash and nasal ointment, which reduce or remove MRSA from hair skin, and nostrils - this process is called MRSA decolonisation. We ask your GP via a letter to prescribe the MRSA decolonisation treatment if you are not on hospital admission when diagnosed with MRSA. A patient who is infected with MRSA is usually treated with an antibiotic either orally or through intravenous lines.

How does MRSA spread?

Carriers of MRSA have it on their hands/skin and they can transfer it to people and objects that they touch. Other people can then pick it up on their hands and pass it on to others.

How to protect yourself / stop the spread of MRSA?

Simple hygiene measures reduce the risk of acquiring and spreading MRSA. Use good hand hygiene while you are in hospital. Before and after meals, and after using the toilet or bedpan, wash your hands thoroughly with warm water and soap. Everyone should clean their hands before and after touching patients. Hands can be cleaned with soap and water, or alcohol hand rubs. It's okay to ask any member of staff if they have washed or decontaminated their hands using alcohol gel or hand washing with soap and

water before they commence your treatment, examination or any form of personal care if you have not seen them do so. **Staff will wear gloves and aprons when they care for a patient who has MRSA.** Patients who have MRSA may be moved to a room on their own or into a separate area for people who have MRSA.

Do patients have to stay longer in hospital because they have MRSA?

Patients who carry MRSA do not usually have to stay longer in hospital. Patients who have an MRSA infection or any other infection may have to stay in hospital until it shows signs of clearing up.

They may stay until they have completed their course of antibiotics or they may need to continue treatment when they go home.

A patient who has MRSA can go home or be cared for safely in a nursing home or residential home, using simple hygiene measures without the risk of it spreading to others in the family or care home. Please try not to worry if you have MRSA positive test result.

Can MRSA harm friends and family visiting patients in hospital?

MRSA does not usually affect healthy people. It does not usually harm elderly people, pregnant women, children and babies. But it can affect people who have serious health problems and people who have chronic skin conditions or open wounds.

Visitors can reduce the risk of spreading MRSA to other people by:

- Clean their hands on arrival and at the end of their visit to the hospital wards using alcohol hand gel or soap and water.
- Not sitting on the patients beds
- Taking advice from clinical staff if someone who has a long-term health problem wants to visit a patient who has MRSA or if a patient who has MRSA wants to visit another patient in the hospital.

If you have any comments about this leaflet or any other enquiry, please contact:

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If you would like this leaflet translated into another language/large print, please contact the Quality Team on 020 8909 5439.

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17-193 © RNOH

Date of publication: July 2016

Date of next review: July 2019

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Control Team