

## INFECTION PREVENTION & CONTROL SERVICE

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# Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA) Information for Patients and Visitors

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### What is MRSA?

MRSA is short for *Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus*.

*Staphylococcus aureus* is a bacteria often found in the nose or on the skin of healthy people, causing them no harm. Infections with this bacteria can usually be effectively treated with a range of antibiotics.

MRSA is a type of *Staphylococcus aureus* that has become resistant to many of the antibiotics commonly used to treat a *Staphylococcus aureus* infection, when it occurs. The resistance can make MRSA more difficult to treat.

### Is MRSA harmful?

MRSA can be present on your body without causing you any ill effect. This is referred to as 'colonisation'. MRSA rarely, if ever, presents a danger to the general public.

However, infections due to MRSA can occur in wounds, blood, urine or the lungs and cause signs and symptoms of infection, such as pus in the wound or a fever.

Hospitalised patients appear to have the greatest risk of acquiring MRSA infection because they are unwell with a lowered resistance to infection.

This is why it is important to find out which of the people being admitted to hospital are likely to be carrying MRSA on their bodies.

### How do I know if I have it?

Many people in the community carry MRSA, therefore you may have it on your skin when you come into hospital. Staff will ask you several questions in order to assess the likelihood that you are colonised with MRSA.

Swabs may be taken from you on admission and analysed in the laboratory. This test will take 2-4 days to give a result.

## **How is MRSA spread?**

MRSA is transmitted via:

- Contact with other persons already carrying MRSA.
- On the hands of patients, relatives and health care workers after contact with an infection patient or equipment.
- Environmental surfaces and equipment.

## **Can I spread it to other people?**

Yes. People in hospital are more prone to this infection due to illness, surgery, medications and procedures that weaken the body's defence mechanisms.

People on some antibiotics are also potentially at risk.

**Good hand hygiene is the single most important measure in preventing the spread of MRSA within hospitals.**

## **Will I need to be isolated?**

You may need to be placed in isolation to prevent the spread of MRSA to other patients. Staff caring for you may need to wear masks, gloves and gowns / aprons to prevent them carrying this bacteria to other patients.

## **How is MRSA treated?**

Antibiotic treatment for MRSA is not always necessary. This will depend on where it has been found and if an infection is present or not.

During your time in the ward, you may be given antiseptic wash and antibacterial ointment. Using these as prescribed will help reduce the MRSA on your skin.

## **Will it affect my family and friends?**

Visitors, including pregnant women, are not at risk from MRSA. However, we would remind you that **your visitors must wash their hands on leaving your room.** If your visitors have other people to visit in hospital they should do that before coming to see you. Your clothing can be taken home and washed and ironed as usual.

## **How do we know when MRSA is no longer a problem?**

Swabs are obtained from the nose, groin and perineum and from any wounds or dermatitis. These are tested to see if MRSA is still present.

Changes in your health or antibiotic usage may lead to the re-emergence of MRSA. Please advise your GP, Specialist, Midwife or Nurse that you have had MRSA.

## **Will MRSA prevent me from going home?**

MRSA will not prevent you from going home. You will be discharged as soon as your general condition allows.

## **What happens when I go home?**

At home, maintain general personal hygiene and household cleaning. Good hand washing is very important.

**If there is anything else you wish to know, please contact the  
Infection Prevention and Control Nurse.**

**The single most effective way to prevent hospital acquired infections is good hand  
hygiene... It's not rocket science, but it will save lives.**

**This information is also available as a pamphlet by ordering via supply using the  
Reference Number: 0206.**