

What is MRSA? - Information for Patients

MRSA stands for Meticillin (M) resistant (R) Staphylococcus (S) aureus (A).

Staphylococcus aureus is a common bacterium (germ) which can be found on the skin or in the nose of about a third of the population. Many normal healthy people have Staphylococcus aureus on their skin without causing them any harm. MRSA is a type of Staphylococcus aureus which is resistant to the more commonly used antibiotics.

What is the difference between colonisation and infection?

Clear distinction should be made between MRSA colonisation (i.e. symptomless carriage of MRSA) and MRSA infection.

Colonisation;

The presence of MRSA on the nose, skin or wounds without any evidence of infection.

Infection;

The presence of MRSA and clinical signs and symptoms of infection (e.g. temperature, redness and swelling) or MRSA that has been isolated from an internal sterile body site e.g. bone or joint.

Who is at risk?

Patients undergoing invasive procedures such as operations, or insertion of medical devices (e.g. urinary catheters and infusion lines) are at risk of developing infection from bacteria including MRSA.

For this reason patients with medical devices and with known MRSA colonisation will be closely monitored for potential signs of infection.

How is MRSA infection treated?

MRSA infections are treated with specific antibiotics under the guidance of the Consultant Medical Microbiologist advising the doctor in charge of your care.

How is MRSA Colonisation treated?

If you are found to have MRSA colonisation you will be provided with or treated with an antiseptic lotion and antiseptic nasal gel. This treatment may not completely eradicate MRSA but the amount of bacteria will be reduced so the risk of developing an infection is also lowered. You will be given instructions regarding this; planned admissions will usually receive treatment prior to admission.

Treatment of children and babies who have MRSA will be considered on an individual basis by consultation between the team of doctors caring for the child/baby and a Consultant Microbiologist.

Unless patients are being admitted to hospital, treatment for harmless colonisation is not routinely recommended in the community.

How will I know I have MRSA?

All patients admitted to East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust (excluding most day cases, paediatrics and obstetrics) are routinely screened for MRSA by swabs, usually taken by nursing staff.

Within certain areas of the hospital, Intensive Care Unit and Special Care Baby Unit, routine regular screening of patients for MRSA are also undertaken due to increased risks of infection in these patient groups.

If your screening swabs are positive (MRSA is isolated) you will be notified. If this result becomes available after you have left hospital, your GP will be informed.

How do you screen for MRSA?

Swabs and samples will be taken by nursing staff from both nostrils and sometimes also from:

- Axilla (armpits)
- Perineum / groin
- Wounds or broken skin areas
- Catheter urine (if catheterised)
- Sputum (if producing sputum or coughing)

How are patients screened for 'planned' admission?

On admission to the ward the admitting nurse will check that an MRSA screen was taken at the pre-assessment clinic.

If MRSA is detected patients are contacted to arrange for topical decolonisation treatment prior to admission (see also section how is MRSA colonisation treated).

How are patients screened for 'unplanned' admissions?

Patient admitted in an emergency (unplanned) will be screened within 24 hours of admission to hospital.

How reliable is the MRSA screening test?

Screening tests for MRSA are not 100% reliable. The reliability of screening results can be affected by various factors including the number of sites sampled.

How is MRSA spread?

Usually by contact from person to person, most commonly on hands. Sometimes MRSA can also be spread on equipment and the environment.

This is one of the reasons why hospitals have policies for hand hygiene, cleaning of equipment and the hospital environment.

How will having MRSA affect my stay in hospital?

You may be nursed in a single room in areas where patients are at a high risk of infection, either due to their illness or the type of procedures undertaken. This will reduce the risk of staff spreading MRSA from you to others.

Staff who come into your room may wear gloves and an apron if providing care. They will take these off and wash their hands before leaving the room.

Staff coming in just to talk to you or hand you something won't need to wear gloves and an apron. Otherwise your treatment in hospital will carry on as usual.

Always insist that people visiting you clean their hands by using the hand gel or washing with soap and water.

You can go to physiotherapy, occupational therapy and for any tests that you may need in other departments. Your meals will also be served as usual.

Will the treatment of my original condition be affected?

It is unlikely, but you should discuss this with your doctor.

Will I always have MRSA?

Sometimes MRSA may clear on its own particularly if you do not have any persistent wounds or chronic conditions which may encourage continued colonisation of MRSA. Your hospital records will however note your history of MRSA and each time you are admitted measures will be taken to reduce the risk of infection to you.

How will I know if I am clear of MRSA?

Each time you are readmitted to hospital you will be screened for MRSA to reassess if you still have MRSA colonisation.

Can I have visitors or can MRSA harm my family and friends?

MRSA does not harm healthy people, including pregnant women or babies. MRSA can affect people who have certain long term health problems or wounds.

Please ask nursing staff first if you are concerned. Your visitors should clean their hands before and after visiting.

Will I have to stay longer in hospital because I have MRSA?

Most patients who are colonised with MRSA do not usually have to stay longer in hospital. If you have an infection, you may need to stay in hospital until treatment is completed.

Can my visitors pass MRSA to other people?

Cleaning hands limits the opportunity for cross infection of bacteria between people in contact with each other, including MRSA.

How is MRSA controlled in hospitals?

MRSA can spread between patients and there are limited choices of antibiotics for treatment. For this reason steps are taken within the hospital setting to control the spread of MRSA and to protect those patients who are most vulnerable to infection (i.e. intensive care patients, those having insertion of medical devices and patients who do not have the ability to respond normally to an infection due to an impaired or weakened immune system).

All patients who are found to have MRSA blood stream infections are fully investigated to try to find out the cause of their infection.

This may involve the infection control team discussing your treatment with community healthcare staff who may ask your GP for access to your community health records. This information is treated as confidential.

MRSA is present in all hospitals throughout the UK. All NHS Trusts are required to report all MRSA bacteraemia (isolates of MRSA in blood cultures which indicate serious infection) to the Department of Health.

This information is used to monitor the control of MRSA in hospitals and the community. The Trust policy for the control of MRSA is based on the latest UK, Department of Health guidelines. The policy will be continuously monitored and revised in the event of changing evidence.

Help us to prevent MRSA

- Good hand hygiene - wash your hands regularly, particularly after using the toilet and prior to meals.
- Visitors should clean their hands with the alcohol gel provided.
- Do not sit on other patients beds or allow visitors to sit on yours.
- Keep your bed space free from clutter to enable effective cleaning
- Do not touch any wounds you might have.
- Do not interfere with drips, catheters, etc.

Where can I get more information about MRSA?

- The doctors and nurses caring for you.
- The hospital Infection Control Team:
 - Conquest Hospital - Tel: 0300 131 4500 Ext: 773305
 - Eastbourne DGH - Tel: 0300 131 4500 Ext: 735407

Important Information

The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a qualified practitioner.

Your comments

We are always interested to hear your views about our leaflets. If you have any comments, please contact the Patient Experience Team – Tel: 0300 131 4731 (direct dial) or by email at: esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net

Hand Hygiene

The trust is committed to maintaining a clean, safe environment. Hand Hygiene is very important in controlling infection. Alcohol gel is widely available at the patient bedside for staff use and at the entrance of each clinical area for visitors to clean their hands before and after entering.

Other formats

If you require any of the Trust leaflets in alternative formats, such as large print or alternative languages, please contact the Equality and Human Rights Department.

Tel: 0300 131 4434 Email: esh-tr.AccessibleInformation@nhs.net

Reference

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