Infection Prevention and Control

Information leaflet and advice for patients and visitors

A guide to MRSA

This leaflet explains what MRSA is and what happens when you have MRSA.
What is MRSA?

MRSA stands for “Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus”. There are lots of different types of families of germs found on the human body and in the environment around us. One of these families of germs is called Staphylococcus aureus. MRSA belongs to this family.

Staphylococcus aureus is a bacterium, which lives harmlessly on the skin and in the nose of around 30% of healthy people. MRSA are strains of Staphylococcus aureus that are resistant to several antibiotics. This makes the bacteria more difficult to treat, as there is a reduced choice of antibiotics available, although it is still treatable. If the bacteria stay in the nose or on the skin surface they will cause no harm, but if they enter a wound they may cause infection. All patients have a nose swab taken on admission to hospital to identify if they are carrying MRSA i.e. colonised.

How did I get MRSA?

MRSA is not just found in hospitals. It can be found in care homes, clinics, at home and in the community in general.

We know that MRSA can be transferred by hand (direct contact) or via surfaces and machines (indirect contact). It is difficult to determine how each individual patient acquires MRSA. The MRSA may have been in your skin before you came into hospital. People who have MRSA do not look any different to anyone else.

How can MRSA be treated?

The treatment given will depend on where you have MRSA. Your treatment will be explained to you by your nurse. It may be treated with special cream for your nose. The doctors may also need to prescribe antibiotics. The length of treatment will vary from person to person.

The cohort ward has been specially set up to care for patients with MRSA and you will receive the specialist care needed to eradicate you MRSA. The medical and nursing staff on the ward are very experienced in providing the specialist treatment you need. Please ask your nurse for a copy of the ward 22c cohort ward information leaflet.

If you are placed in a sideroom we ask you not to have contact with other patients until advised by ward staff.

Will this affect my family and friends?

MRSA does not normally affect healthy people and therefore there is usually no need to restrict your visitors. If any of your visitors are directly involved in your care, for example helping you with washing or dealing with body fluids, we would ask them to wear gloves and a plastic apron. It is not necessary for all visitors to take precautions. There is a leaflet available for all visitors giving advice and guidance as how they can keep safe and help us to stop cross infection. Your nurse should be able to provide this leaflet for you.

Hand Hygiene

Hand hygiene is very important. The single most important way of preventing spread of MRSA is by hand washing or using hand gel. Alcohol hand rub is available at the doors of all wards for your visitors to use.

Alcohol hand rub is available at your bedside for you and the health care workers to use at the point of care. You may not see staff use the hand rub at the entrances to wards but they must use the hand rub when indicated on the 5 moments for hand hygiene. Remember is ok to ask out staff to clean their hands.

5 Moments for Hand hygiene

The diagram on the right shows the “five moments for hand hygiene”. These should be followed by NHS staff as well as patients and visitors. Please clean your hands regularly, especially:

- After you have used the toilet, bathroom or commode
- Before you eat (both snacks and meals)
- Between contact with other patients

You may use soap and water, but if your hands are visibly clean you may use alcohol gel instead.

The diagram below provides more information about effective hand cleaning techniques.

**HAND CLEANING TECHNIQUES**

**Will I have to stay in hospital until MRSA is cleared?**

Normally you will be sent home as soon as your general condition allows, so your length of stay should not be affected. If you are being transferred to another hospital you may need to wait a little longer until a side room is available. If you require further treatment to clear the MRSA we will ensure that your GP, other doctor or nursing staff know about this.

**Can MRSA come back?**

MRSA can return after treatment has been stopped. If you come into hospital again you may be asked to occupy a single room or be looked after on the cohort ward while awaiting screen re-results.

**What happens when I'm at home?**

Having MRSA should not affect your normal daily activities, social contacts or prevent you going to work. If you have an open wound this should be kept covered whilst outside your home. It is important to wash your hands well before and after touching your wound.

You, your family, carers and friends may be worried about you going home. If your hospital doctor feels you require more care related to your MRSA they may refer you to a district nurse.

The precautions taken whilst you were in hospital were aimed at preventing the spread of infection to other ill and vulnerable patients. When you are at home, whether this is your own home or a care home, these risks are reduced. Your carers, doctors and nurses may still wear gloves and aprons when they give you care. This is because they may then go and care for other sick people.

It is important that you maintain good hand hygiene.

Handwashing is the most important measure you can take. Clothes and bed linen should be washed at the highest temperature the fabric can withstand and tumble dried if possible.
MRSA can survive in the environment so you should keep your bedroom and areas where you spend most of your time as clean and dust-free as possible.

There is no need to restrict your visitors, unless they are unwell themselves. Your children and visiting children are not at risk from MRSA unless they have a medical condition or are ill.

Understanding infection can be difficult and a worry to us all. This information leaflet may not cover all the concerns you may have about infection in the hospital setting. Please ask ward staff for further information or contact Infection Prevention and Control on 01743 261134 at RSH or 01952 641222 Ext 4489 at PRH.

Contact details for more information

Please talk to your ward staff for more information about MRSA and your care and treatment. You can also contact the Infection Prevention and Control Team on 01743 261134 at RSH or 01952 641222 Ext 4489 at PRH.

If you have very specific questions about MRSA that cannot be answered by ward staff or the Infection Prevention and Control Team then they may recommend that you contact the local unit of the Health Protection Agency. They can be reached on (01743) 261353.

Other sources of advice and information:

- **Patient Advise and Liaison Service (PALS)**
  The Trust’s Patient Advice and Liaison Service will support you and act on your behalf if you or your family have concerns about the care you have received. They will also be able to direct you to other local or national agencies if needed.
  There are PALS offices at both RSH (near the main ward entrance) and PRH (near the main hospital entrance) or you can telephone them on 01743 261691 at RSH or 01952 641222 Ext 4382 at PRH.

- **NHS Direct**
  NHS Direct is a nurse-led advice service run by the NHS for patients with questions about diagnosis and treatment of common conditions.
  Telephone: 0845 464 7
  Website: [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)

- **Patient UK**
  Provides leaflets on health and disease translated into 11 other languages as well as links to national support/self help groups and a directory of UK health websites.
  Website: [www.patient.co.uk](http://www.patient.co.uk)

Website: [www.sath.nhs.uk](http://www.sath.nhs.uk)