

Patient information factsheet

What is MRSA?

MRSA stands for *Meticillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus*.

Staphylococcus aureus is a common type of bacteria that can live on the skin and usually does not cause harm, but can sometimes cause a number of common infections.

MRSA is a type of *Staphylococcus aureus* bacteria that is resistant to a number of commonly used antibiotics, which can make infections caused by MRSA harder to treat.

How common is MRSA?

It is estimated that around 7% of patients who are admitted to hospital have the MRSA bacterium on their skin or in their nose already, even though they may feel well.

How is MRSA spread?

MRSA is mainly spread from person to person through hand contact. This is why washing your hands and using alcohol-based hand gels are so important. Good hand hygiene is one of the most effective ways of stopping the spread of MRSA.

How is MRSA identified?

MRSA is identified by screening. A swab (like a cotton bud) is wiped on the skin - usually in the nose, groin area and any wounds - and sent to the laboratory for testing. Screening may take place at your pre-assessment appointment, if you are coming into hospital for an operation. It will also be carried out on admission to hospital and repeated every two weeks during your stay in hospital.

What happens if I'm found to have MRSA?

MRSA colonisation

If the screening process identifies MRSA on your skin, you are said to be 'colonised' – this is different to having an infection. Colonisation just means the bacteria have been found on your skin and are not causing you harm or an infection.

You will be offered 'decolonisation' treatment. This involves using antibacterial products, such as a body wash to remove the MRSA bacteria from your skin and an antibacterial cream to remove MRSA from inside your nose. The products should be used one or more times a day for five days.

You do not have to be admitted to hospital for decolonisation treatment - you can do it at home before you go into hospital if you have a planned admission or during your hospital stay.

MRSA infection

If you are identified as having an MRSA infection you will be treated with appropriate antibiotics. This may occur in the hospital or in the community.

During your hospital stay

You may be cared for separately from other patients. This known as 'isolation'. Sometimes this will be in a separate room, or it may be possible to care for you on the ward with additional precautions. During this time good hand hygiene is very important. Isolation will be continued until you have had several sets of negative screening swabs.

Can my family and friends visit me?

Yes your friends and family can visit although we do not encourage children and babies to visit hospitals. Visitors will be encouraged to use the hand gel before entering your room and again as they leave.

If your treatment is taking place at home

You should wash every day during the decolonisation process, ideally using a fresh towel to dry yourself each time. You should also wear a new set of clothes each day and try to change your bedding on a daily basis. The resulting laundry should be washed at a high temperature separately from other people's clothes and bedding.

Will the MRSA go away?

You may carry MRSA on your skin and in wounds for some time without it causing you any problems - over time the MRSA may disappear as you continue with your routine personal hygiene and regular washing of your laundry. In some patients MRSA remains on the skin despite treatment. If you go to see your GP or another healthcare professional, it is important to tell them that you have had a positive MRSA result.

Useful links

www.nhs.uk/Conditions/MRSA/Pages/Introduction.aspx

www.nhs.uk/conditions/staphylococcal-infections/pages/introduction.aspx

If you need a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, Braille or on audiotape, please telephone 023 8120 4688 for help.