

**INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS, RELATIVES  
AND CARERS ABOUT MRSA**

**(Meticillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus)**

**If you require this information in an alternative language or format (such as large print), please ask your nursing staff to arrange this or contact the Infection Prevention and Control Nurses on the number provided on the back page of this leaflet.**

## **What is MRSA?**

Germs are small living cells that cannot be seen with the naked eye; (a microscope is needed). These germs live all around us. Most do us no harm, but some germs can cause infection.

*Staphylococcus aureus* is a germ that over 30% of the population carry on their skin or in their nose at any time without being aware of it. Most strains of *Staphylococcus aureus* can be effectively treated with a variety of antibiotics. MRSA is a *Staphylococcus aureus* which has become resistant to the more commonly used antibiotics, and because of this MRSA can cause infections that can be more difficult to treat.

MRSA can live harmlessly on your skin, in your nose or on chronic wounds such as leg ulcers. You may carry MRSA in this way for days, weeks and even months. This is called colonisation.

**It is important to remember that MRSA is not a problem for those of us who are fit and well.**

## **How did I get MRSA?**

It is a myth to think of MRSA as just a hospital germ; it can be caught or just passed on almost anywhere.

MRSA is commonly spread on the hands. If hands come into contact with MRSA and are not cleaned thoroughly before touching someone else, the MRSA germs can be spread to the next person.

## **Where is MRSA found?**

MRSA can be found in the environment, in dust, and even on pets. On humans it prefers to live in warm, moist areas such as the nose, armpit, groins and wounds. It may also be found on anyone's hands including those of healthcare workers, visitors and the other patients.

## **MRSA has been found: what next?**

MRSA was found on your body from a specimen that has been sent to the laboratory for testing. You may not notice any physical effects at all, as it may only be colonising the area swabbed for testing.

It is most unlikely that finding MRSA will affect the treatment of your original condition.

## **The Infection Prevention and Control Team will advise staff on specific measures to be taken; these will include:**

- You may be transferred into a single room or be isolated in a bay.
- You can still go for tests and treatments in other parts of the hospital if necessary. You can also go outside as long as you do not have close contact with other hospital patients.
- To find out where the MRSA germs are on your body, a set of specimens may be taken from the body sites where MRSA is usually carried. These include the nose, any wounds and samples of urine.
- Any staff visiting your room will wear a plastic apron and gloves when providing direct hands on care. They will wash their hands or apply alcohol gel before leaving the room. It is not necessary for staff who come into your room just to talk to you for a short time, or to hand you your meals or drinks, to wear gloves and aprons.

Please feel free to politely remind staff if they appear to have forgotten to wash their hands.

- Your room will be cleaned everyday. Domestic staff will wear aprons and gloves when they carry out cleaning duties. Ask your relatives/friends not to bring too many gifts, flowers or belongings. If your room becomes cluttered, it is difficult for

the domestic team to clean your room thoroughly. If you do not think your room is cleaned properly, please tell a nurse.

If you are transferred into a single room we cannot give you a definite answer as to how long you will need to be in the single room as it takes varying lengths of time to treat MRSA in different people. You will only be in a single room whilst it is absolutely necessary.

### **How is MRSA treated?**

If MRSA requires treatment, washing lotion, ointments and sometimes antibiotics are used.

- An antiseptic liquid lotion will be provided for washing. You should wet the skin before applying the lotion or it may irritate your skin. You will need to bathe/strip wash/shower daily for five days, using the lotion. This helps to cleanse your skin of MRSA. The lotion is also recommended as a hair shampoo and it will need to be used to wash your hair once or twice during this 5 day period. The nurses will help you if you require assistance to do this.
- A nasal ointment will be applied to just inside the nose, 3 times a day. The number of days the ointment is used for depends on the type of ointment prescribed, but is usually 5 days.

### **Can I do anything to help clear the MRSA?**

Washing with the antiseptic liquid lotion and applying the ointment, if required, will help. It is important to put on clean clothes or nightwear after washing.

- Your bed linen and your nightwear will need to be changed daily. If you prefer to wear your own clothes, these will also need to be changed, preferably daily.

- Your clothing, towels and face cloth may be laundered at home. They should be washed separately in the washing machine on the hottest wash the clothes will withstand.

You can also help by regularly washing your hands and ensuring that **everyone** who enters your room washes their hands or uses the alcohol gel provided before leaving the room.

Hand washing is the single most effective infection prevention measure. All staff members are trained in and constantly reminded of the importance of scrupulous hand washing after contact with patients and before carrying out any procedures.

### **How will I know when the MRSA has gone?**

With your permission a series of swabs may be taken and tested by the laboratory.

If MRSA is found again, a further course of treatment may be required.

When you have had 3 consecutive sets of clear swabs, you can assume that the MRSA has gone and you may move back into the main ward.

### **Can MRSA come back?**

Yes, sometimes it can. If it does and you are in hospital, you may repeat the treatment again.

### **Are my visitors at risk from MRSA?**

Visiting can continue as normal. Visitors can maintain normal physical contact with you. MRSA does not usually cause a problem to anyone unless they themselves are ill. However, your visitors should consider the following points:-

- If they are visiting other hospital patients, your visit should be the last of the day.

- Before entering and on leaving your room, your visitors should wash and dry their hands or apply alcohol gel to them.
- If they have any cuts they should be covered with a waterproof plaster.
- They do not need to wear gloves or an apron unless they are going to help the nurses care for you; such as helping with your washing, dressing or bed making.
- It is quite safe for pregnant ladies to visit you.

If you are concerned that your relatives are at risk, please speak to a nurse, or ask to speak to one of the Infection Prevention and Control Nurses.

### **What will happen when I go home?**

MRSA should not stop you going home.

- Treatment should be completed following discharge.
- Further follow up swabs are not usually necessary.

If you are concerned about a family member, please discuss this with the nurse in charge or an Infection Prevention and Control Nurse, before you go home.

### **What happens if I am admitted to hospital again in the future?**

You may be placed in a single room and will be asked if swabs can be taken from your nose and any wounds. These will be sent to the laboratory to look for MRSA. If they are clear you will be moved into the general ward where you can mix freely with the other patients. If they are positive again, you will receive a further 5 days of antiseptic washes and nasal ointment.

### **Why is MRSA a problem in hospitals?**

In hospital there are many patients who are seriously ill and therefore may be too weak to fight off germs/infections.

Thank you for taking the time to read this leaflet. We hope that you have found it useful. If you would like more information, please ask your nurse or the Ward Manager.

We would welcome any suggestions as to how we could improve your hospital stay whilst you are receiving treatment for MRSA.

If you go to another hospital as a patient in future, you should tell them that you have had MRSA.

If you would like to talk to an Infection Prevention and Control Nurse, please ask nursing staff to arrange this for you or contact them on 01423 553112.

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Version 5.0

Reviewed

New Review date

Hospital IC Committee

Approved PICG

September 2015

September 2017

September 2013

14 December 2011