

Information for patients and carers

MRSA

(Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus
Aureus)

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What is MRSA?

MRSA is a type of bacteria that is resistant to several widely used antibiotics. This means infections with MRSA can be harder to treat than other bacterial infections.

The full name of MRSA is Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus. You might have heard it called a “superbug”. MRSA infections mainly affect people who are staying in hospital. They can be serious but can usually be treated with antibiotics that work against MRSA.

How do you get MRSA?

MRSA lives harmlessly on the skin of around 1 in 30 people – usually in the nose, armpits, groin or buttocks. This is known as “colonisation” or “carrying” MRSA.

You can get MRSA on your skin by:

- Touching someone who has it
- Sharing things like towels, sheets and clothes with someone who has MRSA on their skin
- Touching surfaces or objects that have MRSA on them

Getting MRSA on your skin won't make you ill, and it may go away in a few hours, days, weeks or months without you noticing. But it could cause an infection if it gets deeper into your body.

People staying in hospital are most at risk of this happening because:

- They often have a way for the bacteria to get into their body, such as a wound, burn, feeding tube, a drip into a vein, or urinary catheter
- They may have other serious health problems that mean their body is less able to fight off the bacteria
- They are in close contact with a large number of people, so the bacteria can spread more easily

Healthy people (including children and pregnant women) aren't usually at risk of MRSA infections.

Symptoms of MRSA

Having MRSA on your skin does not cause any symptoms and does not make you ill. You will not usually know if you have it unless you have a screening test before going into hospital.

If MRSA gets deeper into your skin, it can cause:

- Redness
- Swelling
- Warmth
- Pain
- Pus

If it gets further into your body, it can also cause:

- A high temperature of 38C° (100.4F°) or above
- Chills
- Aches and pains
- Dizziness
- Confusion

Tell a member of staff if you get these symptoms while in hospital. Call your GP or NHS 111 if you experience these symptoms at home.

Screening and testing for MRSA

If you need to go into hospital and it is likely you will be staying overnight, you may have a simple screening test to check your skin for MRSA before you are admitted.

This is normally done at a pre-admission clinic or your GP surgery. A nurse will run a cotton bud (swab) over your skin so it can be checked for MRSA.

Swabs may be taken from several places, such as your nose, throat, armpits, groin, and any damaged skin. This is painless and only takes a few seconds. The results will be available within a few days.

If you are not carrying MRSA, it is unlikely you will be contacted about the result, and you should follow the instructions from your hospital as normal.

If you are carrying MRSA, you will be told by the hospital or your GP. You may need treatment to remove the bacteria to reduce your risk of getting an infection or spreading the bacteria.

Treatments for MRSA

Removing MRSA from your skin. If screening finds MRSA on your skin, you may need treatment to remove it. This is known as decolonisation.

This usually involves:

- Applying antibacterial cream inside each nostril three times a day for five days
- Washing your body with an antimicrobial wash once daily for five days and using the same antimicrobial wash to wash your hair (instead of shampoo) on days two and four of the five days treatment. The wash should be applied directly to the area and left for 1 minute before washing off
- Changing your towel, clothes and bedding every day during treatment – the resulting laundry should be washed separately from other household laundry, and at a high temperature

Treatment is normally done at home but may be started after going into hospital if you need to be admitted quickly.

Treatment for an MRSA infection

If you get an MRSA infection, you will usually be treated with antibiotics that work against MRSA.

These may be taken as tablets or given as injections. Treatment can last a few days to a few weeks. During treatment, you may need to stay in your own room or in a ward with other people who have MRSA infections to help stop it spreading.

You can normally still have visitors, but it is important they take precautions to prevent MRSA spreading.

Preventing MRSA

If you are staying in hospital, there are some simple things you can do to reduce your risk of getting or spreading MRSA.

You should:

- Wash your hands often (hand wipes and alcohol hand gel are also effective) – especially before and after eating and after going to the toilet
- Follow the advice you are given about wound care and looking after devices that could lead to infection (such as urinary catheters or drips)
- Report any unclean facilities to staff – don't be afraid to talk to staff if you are concerned about hygiene

If you are visiting someone in hospital, clean your hands before and after entering the ward and before touching the person. Gel or wipes are often placed by patient's beds and at the entrance to wards.

It is also a good idea to put a dressing over any breaks in your skin, such as sores or cuts, to stop MRSA getting into your body.

Read more advice about visiting someone in hospital.

Contact details

Should you require further advice or information please contact:
Infection Prevention & Control Team on telephone number: **01772 523785**.

Sources of further information

www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk

www.nhs.uk

www.patient.co.uk

www.accessable.co.uk
www.nhs.uk/conditions/mrsa
www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/infections/can-a-hospital-patient-with-mrsa-infection-have-visitors/
<http://mrsaactionuk.net/goingintohospital.html>

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www.lancsteachinghospitals.nhs.uk/patient-information-leaflets

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Our patient information group review our leaflets regularly, if you feel you would like to feedback on this information or join our reading group please contact on email address:

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