

## MRSA- Information for Patients

### What is MRSA?

*Staphylococcus aureus* is a common bacterium (germ) that is found on the skin or in the nose of many people without causing harm. Occasionally in some patients it can cause common skin infections such as boils or sometimes infections after surgery. These infections can usually be treated with antibiotics.

Meticillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) is a type of *Staphylococcus aureus* that has become resistant to many antibiotics including Meticillin. Meticillin is a type of penicillin, an antibiotic that is used to treat infections.

Most of the time MRSA just sits on the skin without causing a problem. Some people carry MRSA for just a few days, but other people carry MRSA for weeks or months. They do not know that they carry MRSA because they have no symptoms, and it does not harm them. This is called 'colonisation.'

### Why is it a problem?

MRSA is not a problem to healthy people, children or pregnant women. However, patients in hospital are more vulnerable to acquiring MRSA infection if they have open wounds e.g., after surgery or have urinary catheters, intravenous lines or are receiving frequent courses of antibiotics. If MRSA enters the body and into the blood stream it may cause an infection.

If a patient gets an infection caused by MRSA it may be more difficult to treat as the bacteria is resistant to many, but not all, antibiotics.

### How do you know if someone has MRSA?

People who are colonised with MRSA do not look or feel different from anyone else. The MRSA does not harm them, and they have no symptoms of infection. The only way hospital staff can find out if someone has MRSA is to send a swab or sample to our hospital laboratory for examination.

Patients who have an infection may develop signs and symptoms, such as a high temperature or a fever. An infected wound may become red and sore and discharge pus. Many other different bacteria can cause these signs and symptoms, but laboratory tests can show whether MRSA is the cause.

## **How does MRSA spread?**

MRSA is spread mostly by direct physical contact between people. Hospital staff have a lot of contact with patients and MRSA can be carried on their hands from patient to patient. This is why healthcare workers may wear gloves and aprons when caring for patients in hospital.

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## **How Do Hospital Staff Care for Patients With MRSA?**

Patients in hospital can be susceptible to infection because of their illness and/or treatment.

Hospital staff take special precautions with patients who have MRSA in order to stop it spreading to other people

Simple hygiene measures reduce the risk of spreading MRSA:

- Everyone should clean their hands before and after touching patients.
- Hands can be cleaned with soap and water, or alcohol hand rubs.
- **Hospital staff may wear aprons and gloves when delivering care to patients with MRSA however these are worn by staff routinely for many other reasons as well.**
- It may be necessary for patients with MRSA to be nurse in a single room.

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## **Can MRSA be treated?**

Once MRSA has been found in one place on the body, staff will usually take more swabs to see if it is present elsewhere on the body.

If treatment is necessary, it will vary depending on whether or not the patient is colonised or has an infection. If needed, treatment prescribed for colonisation may consist of ointment applied inside the nose and an antiseptic skin cleanser/hair wash. In addition, the doctor may prescribe antibiotics if MRSA is causing an infection.

The need for treatment will be assessed by the doctors caring for you in hospital and is based on each person's individual circumstances.

## **Do patients have to stay longer in hospital because they have MRSA?**

Patients who are colonised with MRSA do not usually have to stay longer in hospital. Patients who have an MRSA infection or any other infection may have to stay in hospital until it shows signs of improvement.

## **Leaving hospital with MRSA**

Patients leaving hospital with MRSA who are colonised with MRSA or have an MRSA infection, do not need to take the same special precautions at home as in hospital. Normal hygiene precautions such as hand washing, good hygiene and cleaning procedures in your household are sufficient.

## **Can MRSA harm friends and family visiting patients in hospital?**

Patients with MRSA can have visitors as usual. Patients or visitors who have any concerns should feel free to discuss them with the nursing or medical staff, or a member of the infection control team.

It is generally not necessary for visitors to wear plastic aprons or gloves. Hospital staff wear these items in addition to washing their hands as part of infection control measures to prevent spread of MRSA. However, if visitors are assisting with personal care staff on the ward may advise them to wear aprons and gloves.

It is important that visitors wash their hands with soap and water or alcohol gel when arriving on the ward and before leaving.

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## **Who needs to know that I have MRSA?**

Only staff involved in your health care need to know you have MRSA. Patients with MRSA who are admitted to hospital again should tell the nursing and medical staff that they have had MRSA previously.

## **Where can I find more information?**

If you would like any further information, please speak to the member of staff looking after you. You can also discuss your concerns with a Matron or a member of the Infection Prevention & Control Team 0151 702 4014.

The Public Health England and The NHS website are other sources of information:

<http://www.hpa.org.uk>  
[MRSA - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

**This leaflet can be made available in different formats on request. If you would like to make any suggestions or comments about the content of this leaflet, then please contact the Patient Experience Team on 0151 702 4353 or by email at [pals@lwh.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@lwh.nhs.uk)**

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