Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA)

Patient Information Leaflet
MRSA is not a new problem – it first appeared in the early 1960’s. In some countries where antibiotics are available much more freely than here, the spread of MRSA has been accepted as more or less inevitable. In the UK there has been and continues to be a focus on prevention and control.

This leaflet aims to answer some of the more frequently asked questions about MRSA.

**What is MRSA and what can it do?**

Staphylococcus is a bacterium (germ) that is commonly found on the skin or in the noses of many healthy people without causing harm, this is known as colonisation. However, it can sometimes cause abscesses, boils, wound infections and less frequently, more serious infections such as septicaemia (blood poisoning), particularly in those who are already unwell.

These infections can usually be effectively treated by commonly prescribed antibiotics. However, some strains of *Staphylococcus aureus* are resistant to an antibiotic called methicillin and some other antibiotics that are usually used to treat infection. They are referred to as methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA). MRSA is unlikely to present a problem to a healthy person.

**How do you know when someone has MRSA?**

The only way staff (medical/nursing) can find out if someone has MRSA is to send a swab or other sample, for example, urine, to our hospital laboratory for examination. The medical/nursing staff will then advise the patient of their test results. Many people who have MRSA experience no symptoms at all; this is known as “colonisation”.

In people who are colonised, the germ is causing them no harm as it just settles on the skin and can live harmlessly in the nose or on the skin of around 25-30% of people. It can still be spread to more susceptible individuals, particularly in a hospital environment.
Why is MRSA important in hospital?

Patients in hospital can be susceptible to infection because of their illness and/or treatment. If a patient gets an infection caused by MRSA it may be more difficult to treat as the germ is resistant to many, but not all, antibiotics. This is why hospital staff take infection control measures to prevent the spread of infections including MRSA, in hospitals.

How do you get MRSA?

MRSA may be on someone’s skin or in their nose before they go into hospital or they may acquire it during their stay in hospital. The germ can spread from one person to another, most often by hand contact.

This is why good hand hygiene is so important in helping to prevent the germ spreading!

How can you prevent the spread of MRSA?

Good hand hygiene and proper hand washing is the most effective way to stop the MRSA germ spreading.

It is particularly important that carers and healthcare workers wash and dry their hands thoroughly between caring for people.

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 to put up the nose, and an antiseptic skin cleanser/hair wash. In addition the doctor may prescribe antibiotics if MRSA is causing an infection.
Each course of treatment takes five days. Once the treatment regime is completed, there are 2 days rest then swabs are taken to see if the treatment has been successful in eradicating the infection. The treatment will then need to be repeated until the swab results come back. If the results are positive then treatment continues. If a result is negative treatment is stopped then a further MRSA screen is required 7 days later. Three consecutive negative screens are required.

**What will happen if a patient in hospital is found to have MRSA?**

If they stay in hospital they may be moved to a single room (this makes it easier to prevent the germ being spread to other patients).

**Will they be allowed to leave their accommodation?**

Normally patients with MRSA are requested to remain within the room provided. On occasions they may want to leave, nursing staff will advise on any precautionary measures to be carried out to reduce the risk of spreading MRSA to others within the hospital. Nursing staff will also advise on the possibility of relatives/cares taking patients with MRSA out into the grounds of the hospital.

**Can patients with MRSA have visitors whilst in hospital?**

They can have visitors as usual. However, young babies and those who are immunocompromised (people who are more susceptible to infection because of diseases such as cancer, or open wounds, or medications such as steroids) are discouraged from visiting.

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 staffs wear these items in addition to washing their hands as part of infection control measures to prevent spread of the germ. However, if
visitors are assisting with personal care, it may be wise for them to wear gloves and aprons. The nursing staff on the ward will be happy to advise.

All visitors will be advised to wash their hands before after visiting.

**Can MRSA hurt me?**

MRSA will not usually harm healthy people. Concerns about MRSA harming family and friends should be discussed with nursing/medical staff.

**Will MRSA delay discharge from hospital?**

If a patient is medically fit they may be discharged home or back to a nursing or residential home. Treatment is usually stopped when patients are discharged home.

**Will the hospital tell the GP/Nursing home and Community Nurse about the MRSA?**

When a patient leaves hospital, staff will write and if necessary telephone the GP or Nursing Home informing them of the test results and what treatment has already been given or is required to treat the infection. They will also be advised of when, or if any further swabs/sample needs to be repeated.

**Will Community Nursing/GP staff take special precautions?**

If they are providing personal care they too, like hospital staff, will wear gloves and aprons, as they will be attending to other patients. They will always wash their hands or use a disinfecting hand rub before leaving the home.

**Do people with MRSA need to stay indoors until the germ has gone?**
No – they should lead a normal life doing everything they did before acquiring the germ.

**What should happen if someone with MRSA is admitted/re-admitted to hospital?**

The patient, a relative or carer should tell the hospital staff (medical/nursing) that they have, or have had, MRSA in the past.

Because MRSA can come back, even after treatment appears to have been successful, certain precautions are necessary. Swabs may need to be taken again and a side room may be necessary until negative sample results are obtained.

**Should I tell anyone if I have had MRSA?**

Yes. It is important to tell the nurses and doctors who are looking after you if you have had MRSA in the past.

It is especially important if:

- If you are about to go into hospital
- Before admission to a nursing home
- To also, tell your GP, Practice nurse and dentist.

However, it is not necessary to tell family or friends if you don’t wish to do so.

**Where can I obtain further information regarding MRSA?**

We hope that this leaflet has been helpful and that you will soon feel better. Please do not hesitate to speak to the ward staff caring for you if you have any worries or concerns. Alternatively, you can talk to the Infection Control Nurse, who will visit you on the ward if you wish, please ask your nurse to contact them.

Further information can be obtained from:
Health Protection Agency North West
Rooms 103-112
First Floor, DBH House
105 Boundary Street
Liverpool L5 9YJ

Tel: 0151 482 5688
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Translation Information: