

MRSA Screening (elective patients)

Information and advice for patients

Infection Prevention and Control

What is MRSA?

MRSA stands for Meticillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*. It is a type of *Staphylococcus aureus* bacteria that is very resistant to antibiotics so infections due to MRSA can be quite difficult to treat.

MRSA bacteria can live harmlessly on the skin or in the nose of a person without causing symptoms; this is known as being 'colonised' with MRSA or 'carrying' MRSA. However in some circumstances the bacteria can enter the body and cause infections.

Around 1 in 3 people carry *Staphylococcus aureus*, and less than 1 in 10 people coming into hospital carry MRSA.

What is MRSA screening?

MRSA screening is a test that all patients coming into hospital have to identify if they are carrying the MRSA bacterium. It will be done at your pre-admission appointment and involves a swab being taken from your nose and/or groin, and any cuts or wounds you have. If you have a urinary catheter a sample of urine will also be taken from the tube. The swabs/samples will then be tested in the laboratory.

What are the benefits of MRSA Screening?

Infections due to MRSA are more likely to occur when patients are in hospital, being treated with antibiotics or having drips inserted and removed. Screening helps to identify patients who are carrying the MRSA bacterium so they can be treated to prevent them developing an infection or passing the bacterium to other patients.

The test identifies 9 out of 10 people who are carrying MRSA.

Are there any risks?

There is a risk that the test will produce a negative result even if you are carrying MRSA; this occurs in 1 in 10 patients. The test also does not identify the ordinary *Staphylococcus aureus* bacterium.

Are there any alternative ways of screening for MRSA?

There are no alternative ways of screening for MRSA.

What are the risks of not being screened for MRSA?

If you are not screened for MRSA we cannot identify if you are carrying the bacteria and give you the appropriate treatment to reduce your risk of developing an MRSA infection.

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When do I get the result?

The results will be sent to the doctor looking after you. If your MRSA screen shows you to be carrying MRSA you will be contacted as soon as possible.

What will happen if I am found to be carrying MRSA?

If you are found to be carrying MRSA it does not mean that you are infected with MRSA, only that you are carrying MRSA on your skin.

In some cases your surgeon will decide to delay your operation to see if you can be cleared of MRSA, but in many cases the surgery will proceed as normal but you will be given treatment to try and clear the MRSA. This treatment will involve applying an ointment to the inside of your nose, and showering and shampooing your hair with an antiseptic soap. You will be given full instructions on how and when to use these.

When you come into hospital for your operation you may be nursed in a single room or in a ward or part of a ward together with other patients who have screened positive for MRSA.

Even if your screening result for MRSA is negative, it is advisable to use antiseptic washes to shower and shampoo your hair during the 48 hours before your operation. This can be purchased from any pharmacy. Depending on the type of surgery you are having you may be given a container of antiseptic washes at your pre-operative assessment visit.

What are the benefits of treatment?

The benefit of this treatment is that it will reduce the risk of you developing an MRSA infection and transmitting it to others.

What are the risks of treatment?

Your skin could become irritated by the washes if you are allergic to the ingredients and could become dry, red, sore and/or cracked. If this happens please stop using it and tell the person looking after you (if you are in hospital) or your GP (if you have been discharged).

What are the risks of not getting treatment?

If you do not complete your treatment there is a small risk of developing an infection and transmitting the bacteria to others.

Are there alternative treatments?

There are alternative products available to reduce MRSA carriage, however Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust uses the treatments nationally recognised and scientifically proven to be effective. These alternatives can be used if you are allergic to the products routinely used.

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Treatment with antibiotics is also available and your doctor/nurse will advise you if this is appropriate for you.

How long will I carry MRSA for?

Some people may carry the germ for long periods of time whilst others may no longer carry it after they have received treatment.

If you develop an infection your doctor will know you have carried MRSA in the past and will be able to prescribe the correct antibiotics without delay, but will not mind if you remind them.

Are my relatives at risk of catching the germ from me?

The MRSA bacterium is not a problem for healthy people and there is no reason why your relatives and friends should keep away from you. However they should cover any cuts with waterproof plasters and should wash their hands after visiting you. This is to prevent MRSA from spreading. They only need to wear gloves and plastic aprons if they are helping with your care whilst you are in the hospital.

For more information please see the leaflet 'Helping us to reduce the risk of cross infection'.

Should I stay away from work/school?

You do not have to stay off work/school if you are colonised with MRSA. If you have an infection your doctor might advise you stay off if you are unwell. If you are unsure please speak to your GP who will know your clinical history.

If you are a healthcare worker you should inform your Occupational Health Department.

Contact details

If you have any questions or concerns please speak to the doctor looking after you, your GP or the hospital.

Hospital Infection Prevention and Control Service

0121 554 3801 (ask for Infection Prevention and Control Service)

Further Information

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk/conditions/mrsa

NHS Direct

For health information and reassurance:

www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

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For more information about our hospitals and services please see our websites www.swbh.nhs.uk and www.swbhengage.com, follow us on Twitter @SWBHnhs and like us on Facebook www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs.

Further Infection Prevention and Control information leaflets can be found on our website, or you can ask a member of staff for a copy. You may find the following leaflets useful:

- MRSA
- MRSA screening (emergency patients)
- Helping us to reduce the risk of cross infection

Sources used for the information in this leaflet

- Department of Health, 'Screening for Meticillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) colonisation. A strategy for NHS trusts: summary of best practice', 2006 (updated 2008)
- Clinical Infectious Diseases Journal, 'Randomized controlled trial of chlorhexidine gluconate for washing, intranasal mupirocin, and rifampicin and doxycycline versus no treatment for the eradication of methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus colonization', 2007
- British National Formulary 62, section 13, Skin cleansers, antiseptics, and desloughing agents: Chlorhexidine', 2011

If you would like to suggest any amendments or improvements to this leaflet please contact the communications department on 0121 507 5495 or email: swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net



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