

MRSA general information

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 (germ) 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 such as wound, skin, eye and urine infections.

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

What causes an MRSA infection?

MRSA infections develop when the MRSA bacteria enters the body. Infections due to MRSA are more likely to occur when patients are in hospital, being treated with antibiotics or having drips inserted and removed.

How does MRSA spread?

MRSA spreads through the air and also through touching hands or surfaces that are contaminated with the bacteria.

What are the symptoms of MRSA?

If you are colonised with MRSA (are carrying it on your skin) you will not have any symptoms. If you become infected with MRSA the symptoms you have will depend on the part of the body that is infected. Common symptoms of infection include skin lesions, recurrent boils and fever and chills if the infection is more widespread.

How is MRSA diagnosed?

All patients coming into hospital or our intermediate care facility will have a test to see if they are carrying MRSA (MRSA screening). This involves a swab being taken from the nose and/or groin, and any cuts or wounds and testing it in the laboratory.

An MRSA infection is diagnosed by testing a sample from the infected area of the body.

What is the treatment for MRSA?

MRSA colonisation

If you are found to be carrying MRSA you will be informed as soon as possible. Please note that this does not mean that you are infected with MRSA, only that you are carrying it on your skin.

MRSA general information

Information and advice for patients

Infection Prevention and Control

The 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.

MRSA infection

If you have an MRSA infection you will need a course of antibiotics, and will also need the same treatment for MRSA carriage as above.

If you are found to be carrying MRSA or you have an MRSA infection you may be nursed in a single room or in a ward or part of a ward together with other patients who have MRSA.

What are the benefits of treatment?

MRSA colonisation

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

MRSA infection

The benefit of treating MRSA infection is that it will help to prevent further complications. It is vital that you complete your course of antibiotics even if you are feeling better.

What are the risks of treatment?

MRSA colonisation

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).

MRSA infection

The most common side effect of antibiotics is an upset stomach, nausea (feeling sick) and diarrhoea. If you have an allergy to any antibiotics please let your doctor know before starting.

What are the risks of not having treatment?

MRSA colonisation

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

MRSA infection

Not having treatment may mean that your infection gets worse and may become a lot more severe.

MRSA general information

Information and advice for patients

Infection Prevention and Control

Are there alternative treatments?

MRSA colonisation

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.

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

MRSA infection

There are no alternative treatments for MRSA infection; the only proven treatment is antibiotics.

What happens when I am ready to leave hospital?

Having MRSA should not delay your discharge from hospital once you are well. If a district nurse/midwife is visiting you, s/he will be told that you may still have MRSA and may wear aprons and gloves. Once you get home there will be no need for any special precautions.

If you develop a wound infection or become unwell after you have been discharged please see your GP or practice nurse.

If you will be coming back to hospital in the near future for an invasive procedure or operation you may be given some antibacterial washes to use.

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.

If you are admitted to hospital in the future you should always tell the doctors and nurses that you have had MRSA in the past.

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.

MRSA general information

Information and advice for patients

Infection Prevention and Control

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.

Can MRSA be prevented?

The spread of MRSA can be prevented by regular cleaning, good hand hygiene and by following the hospital infection control guidelines which can be found in the leaflet 'Helping us to reduce the risk of cross infection'.

Screening for MRSA when coming into hospital 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.

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

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:

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

MRSA general information

Information and advice for patients

Infection Prevention and Control

Sources used for the information in this leaflet

- The Journal of Hospital Infection, 'Guidelines for the control and prevention of methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA) in healthcare facilities', 2006
- The Journal of Hospital Infection, 'A systematic review of the evidence for interventions for the prevention and control of methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus', 2006
- The Journal of Antimicrobial Chemotherapy, 'Guidelines for the prophylaxis and treatment of methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus Aureus infections in the UK', 2006
- 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
- The Cochrane Library, 'Antimicrobial drugs for treating methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus colonization (Review)', 2004
- 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



A Teaching Trust of The University of Birmingham
Incorporating City, Sandwell and Rowley Regis Hospitals
© Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust

ML4497

Issue Date: February 2014
Review Date: February 2016