

MRSA

Information for patients



What is MRSA?

MRSA stands for Meticillin Resistant Staphylococcus aureus. Staphylococcus aureus (SA) is a family of common bacteria which may cause a number of infections. Most strains are usually easily treated with antibiotics. However, MRSA is a strain which has become resistant to many of the antibiotics that are usually used to treat SA infections.

MRSA can live harmlessly on your skin – this is known as ‘colonisation’. However, it can cause an infection if it gets into your bloodstream through broken skin, wounds or medical devices. Those who are seriously ill or who have an artificial entry point in their skin such as a urinary catheter or cannula are particularly vulnerable.

How is it spread?

MRSA is spread by having close contact with an infected or colonised person. It is almost always spread by direct physical contact, via the hands. However, it can also spread through indirect contact – for example, by touching objects such as towels, sheets or wound dressings, or it can be spread by dust in the environment.

Is it dangerous?

There is a risk but MRSA does not usually harm healthy people – including pregnant women, children and babies.

What is the hospital doing to reduce the spread of MRSA?

The Royal Cornwall Hospitals Trust has a policy which informs staff of measures they should take to control the spread of MRSA. If you would like to know more about this, please ask a member of staff for details.

Patients who are having certain operations may be prescribed ointments and medicated soap to reduce the amount of bacteria on their skin.

What can I do to help reduce the spread of MRSA?

Help to protect yourself and other patients by always washing and drying your hands:

- before you eat
- after using the toilet
- after contact with an infected patient/patient surrounding.

Good hand hygiene is vital for the control of MRSA:

- Please ask visitors to wash and dry their hands before and after visiting you.
- Please remind staff to wash and dry their hands before and after caring for you.

You can also help reduce the spread of MRSA by:

- not touching wounds
- maintaining good personal hygiene
- keeping your bedspace free of clutter so that it is easy to clean
- asking visitors not to sit on your bed.

What is the best way to wash hands?

Alcohol hand rub is an efficient and convenient alternative to soap and water. However, soap and water is best:

- after using the toilet, or
- if your hands are visibly dirty.

What will happen if I get MRSA?

You may be transferred to a single room. The door should be kept closed to help prevent the spread of MRSA to other patients. Staff will wear gloves and aprons when carrying out certain aspects of your care.

If you have an infection, you may be treated with antibiotics.

If you are a patient in hospital your doctor will prescribe suppression therapy. Please see the suppression therapy leaflet for further information. If you have been discharged from hospital your GP will be notified by the hospital. If you require suppression therapy, you will be contacted by your GP.

Please ask about your condition and treatment so that you understand what we are doing and why.

Will it affect my family and friends?

Healthy people are not usually at risk and can still visit you.

If you are worried about any of your friends or relatives visiting you, please ask the nursing staff, who will be able to advise you.

Washing can be taken home and washed as normal on the highest temperature the clothing will allow.

What can I do at home to stop the spread of MRSA?

Measures taken in hospital are aimed at controlling and reducing the spread of all germs, not just MRSA.

At home these risks are reduced but you should continue to carry out good personal hygiene. Wash and dry your hands:

- after using the toilet
- after blowing your nose
- after household cleaning
- before eating.

If you have to be admitted to hospital in the future, please tell your nurse if you have had MRSA.

Advice for healthcare workers with MRSA

If your MRSA screen is positive it is advisable to inform your occupational health advisor or manager.

Further information

Further information about MRSA or other infections is available from:

Infection Prevention and Control team: 01872 254969

Health Protection Agency website: www.gov.uk/government/organisation/uk-health-security-agency

If you would like this leaflet in large print, braille, audio version or in another language, please contact the General Office on 01872 252690

