

Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA)

What is MRSA?

Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA) is a germ called Staphylococcus aureus, which has become resistant to some of the more commonly used antibiotics. Methicillin is one of those antibiotics.

Staphylococcus aureus are bacteria that are found on the skin, in the nose and throat of about a third of the population. They usually present no problems at all. This bacteria is the most common cause of simple, uncomplicated skin and wound infections.

Occasionally, it may be responsible for more serious infections and those most at risk are hospital patients undergoing major surgery or those who require intensive care. MRSA is a strain of Staphylococcus aureus which has become resistant to commonly used antibiotics.

It should be noted that the infections caused by MRSA are usually no different or more dangerous than those caused by ordinary strains.

Why is MRSA a problem?

We have known about MRSA since the 1960's but only recently has it become more of a problem in Hospitals and in the Community. If you have an MRSA infection you may need to be treated with less commonly used antibiotics that may take longer.

As MRSA can spread within hospitals/healthcare settings, we take special care to try to stop this happening. In hospitals where many people are seriously ill they may be too weak to fight this infection. It is vital that we make every effort to stop the spread of MRSA to such people.

How can you get MRSA?

It is usually passed on by contact with a contaminated item, environment or human contact.

It is most commonly transmitted on hands, if hands come into contact with MRSA and are not decontaminated successfully by hand washing or sanitising hand rub before touching someone else the germs can be passed to the next person.

How do you know I have MRSA?

All service users admitted to our inpatient facilities are routinely screened for MRSA upon admission, even if they have been transferred from another hospital.

We do this so we can better protect those who do not have MRSA and identify those that do.

A specimen – perhaps a wound swab is sent by your doctor to the laboratory either for routine testing or because staff were concerned that there may be an infection present.

How long could I have had MRSA?

We do not know – it could be a few days or weeks or even longer.

How will MRSA affect me?

Possibly not at all. You may not notice any physical difference at all as it may just be present on your skin. In some people it may cause infections and delay healing.

How is MRSA treated?

Usually with creams, powders and sometimes antibiotics. MRSA in the nose is treated with ointment. Wounds can be treated with ointment or dressings.

Sometimes a special liquid soap is provided for people to wash with. They should make sure that they wet their skin prior to applying this to avoid irritation.

Powder may also be recommended for use after washing. All these treatments are prescribed by a doctor. The whole course of treatment must be completed.

Will the treatment of my original condition be affected?

It is most unlikely, but if you are worried you should discuss this with your doctor.

How will I know that it has gone?

The only way that you can be sure that MRSA is no longer an issue is to have further swabs carried out.

Are my friends and family at risk of MRSA?

MRSA does not normally affect healthy people. If you are worried you can always talk to the staff looking after you or contact one of the Infection Control Nurses.

In hospital your visitors may be asked to wash and dry their hands after visiting you, they do not need to wear gloves or aprons.

If any of your relatives or friends are seriously ill, please check with your District/Practice Nurse or doctor whether it is wise for them to visit.

Will I always be MRSA positive?

Some people do carry the germ for long periods of time. Sometimes it may go away on its own.

What happens if I am having help from district nurses or home care?

The germ is not a risk for healthy people e.g. your friends, family, nurses etc.

However, it can be spread to more vulnerable patients by not washing hands properly. District Nurses and Home Care etc. will be told if the germ has been found on swabs taken from you.

They are given advice to prevent them passing the germ on to other patients that they visit or see. You or your friends and family do not need to take any special precautions in the home.

If I need to go into hospital do I need to tell anyone about MRSA?

Yes, if you are admitted to any hospital in the future, you should always tell them if you have been MRSA positive.

If you require further help or information please contact the Trust's Infection Control Team on 08454 226166.