

Meticillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA)

What is MRSA?

MRSA stands for Meticillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus.

Staphylococcus aureus is a bacterium (bug) or germ often simply called “staph”.

MRSA is a germ that is resistant to some antibiotics – which are medicines used to treat infections – such as penicillin.

This means that many commonly used antibiotics will not work against MRSA.

How do you catch it?

MRSA can be found in the noses and skin of some normal healthy people without developing an infection. This is known as being ‘colonised’.

If however, the bacterium gets into the body through a break in the skin it can cause infection, commonly skin infections and boils.

It is spread through direct contact, usually through vulnerable sites on the body, for example through wounds, catheters or intravenous lines/drips – this is a needle and plastic tube placed into a vein or artery and is used to give drugs or fluids directly into the body.

It can also spread through items that have been used by someone with MRSA such as towels, sheets, clothing and dressings.

MRSA can also survive on objects or surfaces and can contaminate the surrounding environment, such as door handles, sinks, floors and cleaning equipment.

Patient Information

Infection Control Department

Whipps Cross Road, Leytonstone, London, E11 1NR www.whippsx.nhs.uk

What are the symptoms of MRSA?

Most people with MRSA who are 'colonised' feel fine, have no symptoms and will not need any treatment.

If however, MRSA causes an infection, the symptoms can include:

- Boils and abscesses
- Fever
- Chest or urine infections
- Skin infections

Who does it affect? Are some people more at risk?

Those more at risk include:

- Patients who have an intravenous line or drip.
- Patients with catheters.
- Patients with a weakened immune system.
- Patients who have recently had surgery or have an open wound.
- Those being treated in the Intensive Care Unit.

MRSA can affect anyone, but normally causes problems for people who are already unwell as they are more vulnerable to infections.

Hospitals have large numbers of patients who are poorly and vulnerable to infections, which is why it is more common to develop MRSA in hospital.

How is it diagnosed?

Swabs are taken from the patient's nose, throat and groin area and sent to the laboratory to test if MRSA is present.

This is a painless procedure and we routinely take swabs from patients on admission to hospital.

Patients with signs of an infection may also have a sample of blood, urine or pus sent to the laboratory to find out if it is MRSA.

How can it be treated?

If you have tested positive for MRSA but with no signs of infection – this is known as being ‘colonised’ – you will be asked to:

- Wash your body every day with an antibacterial soap called chlorhexidine. This should be applied to the body in ‘neat’ form as you would apply shower gel. Your hair should also be washed with the chlorhexidine twice in each five day course.
- Put an antibacterial gel called bactroban inside your nose three times a day.
- Have swabs taken every week by the nurses to see if MRSA is still there. This will continue throughout your hospital stay to reduce the risk of you developing an infection following any procedures you may have.

If you have tested positive for MRSA and have signs of an infection you will be asked to:

- Wash your body every day with an antibacterial soap called chlorhexidine. This should be applied to the body in ‘neat’ form as you would apply shower gel. Your hair should also be washed with the chlorhexidine twice in each five day course.
- Put an antibacterial gel called bactroban inside your nose three times a day.
- Be prescribed powerful antibiotics, commonly given via an intravenous drip. The antibiotic is usually called vancomycin.
- Have swabs taken every week by the nurses to see if MRSA is still there. This will continue throughout your hospital stay.

The length of time you may need these different treatments will vary, your doctor will be able to advise you on this.

How can you help prevent the spread of MRSA?

If you have been diagnosed with MRSA:

- You may be moved to a side room, however, in some cases you may remain on the ward in a bay area. This decision is taken by the Infection Control Nurses and will depend on the risks to you, other patients and visitors.
- Make sure you wash your hands with either soap and water or alcohol gel (at each ward entrance) when entering and leaving the ward or side room.
- You will need to make sure you follow your treatment plan.
- You will need to maintain good personal hygiene.

You do not represent a particular risk to healthy people including babies and pregnant women, so you can continue to have visitors.

How can we prevent the spread of MRSA?

The hospital has a detailed plan for patients with MRSA. This includes:

- Staff wearing gloves and aprons when caring for patients with MRSA.
- Staff following strict hand washing with alcohol gel or soap and water when looking after infected patients.
- Staff routinely swabbing patients on admission to hospital.
- Cleaning of bed spaces and isolation rooms where patients with MRSA have been nursed.

It's OK to ask our staff if their hands are clean before they start caring for you.

Can you go home with MRSA?

Patients with MRSA can go home when they feel well enough and the doctors are satisfied with their recovery.

If you have been discharged whilst on the MRSA treatment (antibacterial soap and nasal gel), you should continue this at home until the course has been completed. The nursing staff or your doctor will advise you on how to do this and for how long to continue.

There is no need for any special precautions; however it is important to continue good personal hygiene.

If you live with someone who may be vulnerable please ask for advice or discuss this further with the Infection Control Nurses.

If you are going to see your GP or coming back into hospital you should inform staff that you have had MRSA so that you can be re-tested.

Questions or concerns

If you have any further questions or concerns about MRSA please contact our Infection Control Nurses or ask a nurse to arrange for them to come and speak to you.

Contact

Infection Control Nurses, Monday to Friday from 8.30am to 5pm:

- Telephone: 020 8535 6846
- Email: infection.control@whippsx.nhs.uk.

If you need this leaflet in another format, please contact the Infection Control Nurses – details shown above.

Further information

NHS Direct:

- Telephone: 0845 4647
- Website: www.nhsdirect.co.uk

Health Protection Agency:

Provides the figures and rates of MRSA at all NHS hospitals.

- Website: www.hpa.org.uk