

## WHAT IS MRSA?

MRSA stands for Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus. This is known as an antibiotic resistant bacterium, commonly associated with hospital environments and other healthcare settings.

Staphylococcus Aureus is a micro-organism that colonises normal skin. This generally means that it can live there without causing us harm. The organism is found around the warm, moist sites of the body, i.e. the armpits, the groin and other areas. Up to 40% of the population will carry it at some time, mainly in their nostrils.

Staphylococcus is one of the commonest causes of wound infection. The skin forms part of our immune system that protects us from harmful organisms. This is one reason why Staphylococcus Aureus can live on the surface of our skin without causing us harm.

However, when skin is broken or injured through surgery or other invasive procedures, or when a person's immunity has been compromised through illness or treatment, bacteria has the opportunity to gain access to the inside of the body. This can result in a superficial infection if the injury is minor, or a deeper infection which may require antibiotics to resolve the situation.

MRSA is a type of Staphylococcus Aureus which has become resistant to a number of antibiotics over the last few decades.

## PRE-OPERATIVE SCREENING

At Benenden hospital we screen our patients for MRSA by swabbing their nose and armpits. This means that if a patient is positive for MRSA they can receive treatment before coming in for their surgical procedure, minimising their risk of developing an MRSA wound infection. (Certain groups of patients are exempted from screening i.e. endoscopy and Ophthalmology)

## WHO IS AT RISK?

The people **most vulnerable** are surgical patients, those on an intensive care or special care baby unit, and those with a compromised immune system.

## HOW IS MRSA SPREAD?

MRSA is mainly spread through direct contact with someone who has infected or colonised skin (i.e. the organism living in large numbers on their body surface). The organism can survive on dead skin scales, in pus, or in dust in the environment. However, few people acquire it from the environment or by means of airborne spread.

**The primary means of spread is on the hands of people after direct contact.**

## HOW DO WE PREVENT SPREAD?

When we become aware that somebody has this micro-organism, especially within a

hospital setting, certain actions have to be taken to prevent spread to other patients. This will take the form of the infected patient being isolated in a single room and their contact with other patients restricted until they have received appropriate treatment. The staff caring for the patient and anyone visiting will have to take certain precautions to avoid passing this organism onto other potentially vulnerable patients. This will be the wearing of plastic aprons and gloves, and most importantly **strict hand hygiene after contact; washing with soap and water or using the alcohol hand rub available in all areas.** Occasionally other precautions may be necessary if the patient is shedding large amounts of skin scales or is coughing excessively.

## HOW IS MRSA TREATED?

The treatment of MRSA carriage involves the use of an antiseptic wash and a nasal ointment to be used for **five days**. (Some patients may require antibiotics to treat an infection).

**Two days** after completion of the topical treatment we undertake a test to confirm that the organism has gone. Isolation precautions will be reviewed and lifted by the Infection Control Team once they are satisfied that the patient has responded to treatment.

## WILL IT STOP ME GOING HOME?

There should be no delay in you going home. However if a patient acquires a systemic MRSA infection or MRSA in a wound their healing may be delayed and they may need to stay longer.

MRSA generally does NOT pose a problem in the home environment if basic good hygiene is followed. The patient who is at home poses no risk to other family members; care would only need to be taken with someone who has an open wound, catheter or other invasive device.

### **IS THERE A RISK TO MY FAMILY OR FRIENDS?**

MRSA does not pose a risk to healthy people. This includes babies, children and pregnant women.

**The most vital thing is for visitors to be aware of the importance of hand hygiene after contact and on leaving the room. This measure minimises the risk of the organism being passed onto someone more vulnerable.**

The only people who should delay visiting you until you have responded to treatment are:

- Anyone with an open wound
- Anyone about to undergo surgery in the near future
- Anyone with a compromised immune system due to illness or medical treatment (i.e. chemotherapy/radiotherapy)

**There is no other reason for visitors to defer coming to the hospital or visiting you at home.**

If you or any of your visitors have any questions or concerns please speak to the nurse caring for you and they will contact the Infection Control Team who will arrange to visit you.

### **The Infection Control Team are:-**

Heather Coles, Lead Infection Prevention & Control Practitioner  
**There are Infection Control Link Nurses in every clinical area.**

**They can be contacted on 01580 240333  
Ext 7475 or 7043**

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## **INFECTION CONTROL**

### **MRSA**

### **METHICILLIN RESISTANT STAPHYLOCOCCUS AUREUS**

### **THE FACTS YOU NEED TO KNOW**

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