

## About MRSA

### Other formats

**If you need this information in another format such as audio tape or computer disk, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, please telephone the PALS desk on 01271 314090.**

### What is MRSA?

MRSA (sometimes referred to as a superbug) stands for meticillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*.

About one in three of us carries the bacterium *Staphylococcus aureus* (SA) on the surface of our skin, or in our nose, without developing an infection. This is known as being colonised by the bacteria.

However, if SA bacteria get into the body through a break in the skin they can cause infections such as boils, abscesses or wound infections. If they get into the bloodstream they can cause more serious infections.

SA infections may require treatment with antibiotics. However, some strains of the SA bacteria are resistant to some of the more commonly used antibiotics. MRSA bacteria are types of SA bacteria that are resistant to the antibiotic Flucloxacillin.

### How does MRSA spread?

MRSA is usually spread by touch. If a person gets MRSA on their hands, they can pass it to other people and things that they touch.

MRSA was originally linked to patients who had undergone hospital care but in recent years MRSA has become more common in the community. It may be on a patient's skin before they are admitted to hospital and it is not always possible to know where it may have come from. People are often unaware that they carry MRSA because it does not harm them and they have no symptoms.

### How we prevent MRSA from spreading

Most people who carry MRSA do not look or feel different from anyone else and may not have any symptoms.

However, MRSA can spread to other patients, so we will take certain actions with patients who have MRSA to stop this occurring. The main requirements of our policy are that:

- staff wash their hands or use alcohol gel before and after attending to every patient
- all equipment is cleaned thoroughly after use
- patients with MRSA are identified through screening processes
- patients known to be carrying MRSA are given a course of treatment to reduce the numbers of the organism on their skin.
- wherever possible patients with MRSA are cared for in single rooms

It is standard practice for aprons and gloves to be used by staff when carrying out tasks which may involve contact with blood or body fluids. Their use of aprons and gloves stays the same if you carry MRSA.

Policies for treating patients who carry MRSA or who have an MRSA infection vary slightly across the country, according to the local situation. You can request to see a member of the infection control team if you would like to talk about MRSA or our local policies.

## **What will happen if I get an MRSA infection?**

Patients who have an infection caused by MRSA may develop a temperature, or their wound may become red and sore and discharge pus. Many other germs can cause these symptoms, but laboratory tests will be carried out to find out which are causing the infection.

If these tests prove positive for MRSA, the nurses will reassess the best place to look after you. Depending on your condition, you may be nursed in a single room, but occasionally patients are cared for in a bay on the main ward.

Along with the right antibiotics at the right strength, you may be given antiseptic skinwash and ointment for your nose to combat the infection. The antibiotics may be given through an intravenous line (drip) or in tablet form.

## **Will this affect my family and friends?**

MRSA will not cause illness to healthy people, including elderly people, pregnant women, children and babies.

MRSA can affect people who have certain long-term health problems, particularly people who have chronic skin conditions or open wounds.

All visitors should wash their hands or use alcohol gel before and after visiting any patient in the hospital, whether or not they have MRSA colonisation or infection.

If someone who has a long-term health problem wants to visit you, or if you want to visit another patient in hospital, please ask the ward nursing staff or an infection prevention & control nurse for advice.

## **Will MRSA delay my discharge from hospital?**

An assessment of your fitness for discharge will take into account all of your needs and circumstances. MRSA is just one aspect of your care and would not normally cause specific delay to discharge from hospital.

Patients who carry MRSA do not have to stay longer in hospital. Patients who have an MRSA infection may have to stay in hospital until they have completed the course of antibiotics and their infection shows signs of clearing up. Alternatively, they may need to continue treatment when they go home.

If treatment is to be continued, we will make arrangements with community health workers such as your GP.

A patient who is going to a nursing home or residential home can be cared for safely using simple hygiene measures.

## **Will the MRSA go away?**

Sometimes MRSA will seem to disappear from the skin, but after a period of apparent absence it can come back. If you come into hospital again, we will presume you are still carrying MRSA and will give a repeat course of skin antiseptic washes and nasal ointment. This will reduce the chances of causing you an infection during your stay, when you are more vulnerable to infection, and help prevent spread to others.

## **Will it affect my admission to hospital?**

Most patients who are admitted to this hospital for treatment or surgery will be screened for MRSA colonisation either at a pre-operative clinic or on admission. If you are found to be colonised with MRSA then we will provide you with antiseptic skin washes and nasal ointment. If you are to have surgery we may also give you anti-MRSA antibiotics just prior to the operation to further reduce the risk of infection. Should you require emergency surgery we may give the anti-MRSA antibiotics if the results of your MRSA screen are not yet available.

## **Do I need to tell anyone about my MRSA?**

We will inform your GP if we find you are colonised with MRSA or have an infection caused by MRSA. If you require further healthcare attention or are living in a care home please tell the nurse or doctor.

## **What steps does this Trust take to reduce MRSA?**

In order to reduce the risks of MRSA to a minimum, the Trust conforms to all national guidance on patient screening and treatment for MRSA carriage and infection. We also have very clear policies on handwashing and regularly check up on how our staff are performing, displaying these results on the noticeboard at the end of each ward. The housekeeping team work hard to keep everything clean to standards set down nationally, which are closely monitored.

## Further information

If you have any queries please contact the Infection Prevention & Control Department, based at North Devon District Hospital, on **01271 322680**.

Further information can be found in the guidance:

- 'Advice for those affected by MRSA outside of hospital' by the Infection Prevention Society and Department of Health at [www.nhs.uk/conditions/MRSA/Pages/Introduction.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/MRSA/Pages/Introduction.aspx)

Other information and guidance can be obtained from:

- Public Health England, Centre for Infections, 61 Colindale Avenue, London, NW9 5EQ, Tel 020 8200 4400, Fax 020 8205 9185

MRSA bloodstream infection figures for individual acute NHS trusts are published by:

- The Department of Health at [www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk)
- The Public Health England at [www.gov.uk/government/collections/staphylococcus-aureus-guidance-data-and-analysis](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/staphylococcus-aureus-guidance-data-and-analysis)

Information on handwashing can be found at:

- The National Patient Safety Agency [www.npsa.nhs.uk/cleanyourhands](http://www.npsa.nhs.uk/cleanyourhands) – the Trust supports and participates in their cleanyourhands campaign

### **PALS**

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or e-mail [ndht.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ndht.pals@nhs.net). You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple. Alternatively, it may be possible for us to arrange an appointment in your area.

## Have your say

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of the ward staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

'Patient Opinion' comments forms are on all wards or online at  
[www.patientopinion.org.uk](http://www.patientopinion.org.uk).

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