

MRSA

Information for patients

This leaflet explains what MRSA is, how MRSA can be treated and what will happen if you get a positive MRSA test result.

What is MRSA?

MRSA stands for meticillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*.

Meticillin is a type of antibiotic. *Staphylococcus aureus* (staph aureus) is a common type of bacteria that can cause different sorts of infections.

Several strains (types) of the staph aureus bacteria are often resistant to commonly used antibiotics and we refer to these resistant strains collectively as MRSA.

What does antibiotic resistance mean?

Bacteria are a type of germ that may cause infections. Antibiotics are drugs used to treat these infections. Sometimes these drugs will no longer kill the germs. This is called antibiotic drug resistance.

Like many bacterial infections, staph aureus only becomes a problem if you are already ill, injured or have had surgery. In hospital, we need to take special care because bacteria can be spread from person to person quite easily by touch.

What are we doing to reduce the spread of MRSA?

The Royal Free London takes MRSA very seriously. All patients admitted as in-patients are screened (tested) for MRSA to ensure that others are protected from infection. Patients found to have MRSA have the option to be treated and their care will be discussed to ensure that they can still have surgery or investigations even with MRSA. The trust follows the Department of Health guidance on MRSA infections and has a very low rate of infection.

How do we test if someone has MRSA?

A sample is taken from your nose, groin, perineal, blood, urine, sputum or from an infected wound and sent to the laboratory. This test is called a culture and will detect if MRSA is present. If this test is positive, you could be 'colonised' or you might be 'infected'.

What is the difference between being colonised and infected?

Some people have the staph aureus bacteria on their body but are well. Sometimes known as **colonisation**, it means people may carry the bacteria but feel fine and have no signs or symptoms. The bacteria can be treated.

An **infection** means that the bacteria are on or in the body and they are making you feel unwell. You may have signs or symptoms such as fever, pus from a wound or a high white blood cell count.

Does this mean you could have MRSA and feel okay?

Yes, you could. It is quite common and many people in the community or in hospital, are colonised with MRSA without it causing them any problem. The bacteria is most commonly found in the nostrils but can live on other parts of the skin as well as the throat, groin and vaginal area.

Is everyone tested to see if they have MRSA?

We routinely carry out MRSA testing for all hospital admissions (whether pre-booked or emergency cases). If a patient is coming into hospital for pre-booked (routine or elective) surgery, this is usually carried out during the pre-admission visit.

Anyone found to be carrying MRSA is considered for a course of topical antiseptic preparations to try to get rid of other MRSA from the skin, also referred to as 'decolonising' the skin.

How to protect yourself from MRSA

There are some simple but very effective things you can do:

- Use good hand hygiene while you are in hospital. Before and after meals, and after using the toilet or bedpan, wash your hands thoroughly with warm water and soap. If you are not well enough to get out of bed to wash your hands, we will offer you a bowl of warm water and soap.
- Please ask staff if they have washed or decontaminated their hands with soap and water or alcohol-gel before they commence treatments, examination or any form of personal care if you have not seen them do so.
- Please request that visitors do not visit you if they are not very well themselves.

How visitors can help to protect you from MRSA

- Wash your hands with warm water and soap or use the alcohol hand rub when you arrive on the ward and before you leave.
- Please do not sit on patient beds – this will help to reduce the amount of bacteria in the patient's environment.

We hope that what you have read so far gives you some helpful background information about MRSA. The rest of this leaflet tells you about what will happen if you have a positive MRSA result.

How did I get MRSA?

We can't be sure how you got it. Many people, both inside the hospital and out in the community, could get a positive result as the MRSA bacteria can be carried by people without it causing them any problem. Please try not to worry if you have just had a positive test result.

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

The single most important thing that helps stop the spread of the MRSA bacteria is good hand hygiene. Before and after meals, and after using the toilet or bedpan, or after touching any open wounds, wash your hands thoroughly with warm water and soap. There are posters on the wards showing how to wash hands thoroughly.

How do you treat MRSA?

If you are colonised with MRSA, you will be given a separate information sheet explaining our treatment method. The treatment given to you is designed to decolonise you (to stop the colonisation from causing an infection).

You will be given cream for your nose and an anti-bacterial body wash. The body wash should be used during your daily shower or bath and, when advised to do so, to wash your hair. Use it every time you wash your hands.

If you have an infection your doctor may decide to use an antibiotic treatment – this may be in the form of tablets or through a drip while you are in hospital.

Will I need to be in isolation?

We aim to isolate patients who have a positive MRSA test. This may be in a side room or in an area within a ward. By isolation we mean caring for you away from other patients. All staff will wear gloves and aprons while attending to your needs. Cleaning of your room will continue as normal, but cleaning staff will also wear gloves and aprons.

Could I pass MRSA on to others?

Yes, MRSA can be passed on to other people. That is why we always practice good hand hygiene and aim to care for patients with MRSA away from other patients and take extra precautions such as wearing gloves and aprons.

Can I have visitors in hospital or when I go home?

Yes. You can have visitors in hospital and at home. As the MRSA bacteria are passed on through touch, you and your visitors should practice good hand hygiene which is proven to be simple and effective.

When your family and friends visit you in hospital, ask them to wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water or with the alcohol hand rub when they arrive and before they leave. MRSA infections are unlikely to occur in healthy relatives and friends.

How will I know if the MRSA has cleared?

We may test you again after you have finished your treatment to see if the MRSA has cleared. In some instances you may require a second course of treatment. We usually like to have three clear tests before you are considered free from MRSA.

If you come back to hospital, you may be admitted into a single room and tested again to check for MRSA.

Will MRSA stop me going home?

Once you are medically fit to leave, MRSA will not delay your discharge. If you live with vulnerable people, any precautions that should be taken will be discussed with you and your carers.

Will I need to inform anyone?

Yes. There are times when this would be advisable, eg if you visit your GP or out-patients department, or are re-admitted to any hospital. If you have to come into hospital again, you may be nursed in a single room and the nurses may test you again to check for MRSA. This does not necessarily mean that MRSA has come back.

If you have any further questions please contact our infection prevention and control team on:

Barnet Hospital: 020 8216 4454

Chase Farm Hospital: 020 8216 4454

Royal Free Hospital: 020 7472 6607

For more information please visit:

- NHS Choices
www.nhs.uk
- Public Health England
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mrsa-information-for-patients>

This leaflet is available in other languages, large print, Braille and audio format upon request; please ask a member of staff.

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