



The Clatterbridge
Cancer Centre
NHS Foundation Trust

MRSA

Infection Control



A guide for patients and visitors

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This leaflet will answer some of the questions that patients frequently ask about MRSA and will explain ways to treat the infection and prevent it from spreading.

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MRSA stands for meticillin (M) resistant (R) Staphylococcus (S) aureus (A).

MRSA is a type of a bacterium (germ) called Staphylococcus aureus that does not respond to commonly used antibiotics. If you have been told that you have MRSA, it doesn't automatically mean you are infected, so there's no need to be alarmed.

Symptoms

MRSA can live in warm, moist areas on the body such as the nostrils or in the groin area and, under normal circumstances, does not cause illness.

Some people carry MRSA as one of their 'normal' body germs. This is not at all harmful and is known as being colonised. People colonised with MRSA do not look or feel different from other people, so they may have no symptoms at all.

MRSA can sometimes cause infections if it gets inside the body, for example through a wound, a drip or a catheter. Infections with

MRSA can look the same as other infections and the symptoms will depend on the site of the infection.

General signs of infection include:

- High temperature
- Pain, redness and swelling in a wound
- Pain, and difficulty passing urine (if an infection is in the bladder)

Diagnosis

The normal process for investigating infections is for doctors or nurses to collect swabs or samples from any body site thought to be infected. If MRSA is causing the infection, this will be picked up by laboratory staff and the results will be given to ward staff.

Treatment

If a person is colonised with MRSA, this does not always need to be treated. In some cases, MRSA disappears naturally over a short period of time; however, in others, colonisation may be prolonged.

If a person is in hospital or due to come into hospital, he/she may be asked to use a special antiseptic in the hair and on the body and a special cream for the nose. Some people may have a wound that requires a special type of dressing. This is called MRSA clearance therapy or MRSA decolonisation therapy.



If a person has an infection caused by MRSA, this may require treatment with antibiotics in addition to decolonisation therapy with antiseptics.

If you have an infection at any time in the future or if you need to go into hospital, it is really important that you tell your doctor or any healthcare professionals that you have had MRSA before. This is because infections with MRSA can look the same as other infections but need a different type of antibiotic treatment.

Prevention of spread

Unfortunately, MRSA can survive in the environment, especially in dust, on bed sheets, curtains and other surfaces. It is important for patients to have high standards of hand hygiene and to change their clothing and towels daily or sooner if they become soiled.

If your wound dressing is wet or the wound is leaking through the dressing, please tell a member of staff so that a fresh dressing can be applied as soon as possible. Always tell the staff if you are experiencing pain, redness or swelling from any wound or other sites. If you have any tubes, drips, drains, catheters or breathing aids (such as a nebuliser) ask your nurse how you can help to keep them clean.

There is no need to use plastic cutlery or crockery or special clothing as MRSA can be destroyed easily outside the body at normal washing temperatures and the germs removed with soap and water.

Hand hygiene

Thorough hand washing using soap and water is always important especially after using the toilet; after helping someone else to use the toilet; before serving food or eating and after cleaning the environment.

Many of our wall mounted hand rub and soap dispensers are automatic and there is no need to touch them. Simply place your cupped hands underneath the dispenser and the correct amount will be dispensed onto your hands. For manual pump dispensers, just dispense one measured amount and use to cleanse your hands.

Infection prevention and control measures

When a person with MRSA is in hospital, we have to take a little extra care to protect them and other people while we try to get rid of the MRSA.

Hospital staff will take care to wash their hands or use the hand hygiene rub at the bedside before and after touching a patient. Staff will also use gloves and aprons when providing close personal care for patients, such as changing dressings or making beds.

These other simple steps also help to minimise the risk of MRSA spreading:

- Encouraging people with MRSA to use the antiseptics and special cream to reduce the number of bacteria on the skin and in the nostrils



- All wards and equipment are cleaned every day, sometimes using a special type of disinfectant
- Changing bed linen daily, sooner if it becomes soiled
- People with MRSA will be cared for in a side room whenever possible. It is really important that clutter is kept to an absolute minimum

Please ask a member of staff if you are unsure of any additional infection control precautions required.

Advice about visitors

We ask that any visitors follow our normal visiting guidelines, including any additional infection control precautions advised by the ward staff, especially if wards or areas are closed to admissions.

- As a general rule, visitors do not need to wear gloves and aprons when visiting someone with MRSA, but they must use the hand hygiene rub before and after visiting. This protects patients and prevents the spread of infections to others
- People should NOT visit if they feel unwell, especially if they have an infection, diarrhoea or vomiting
- It would be appreciated if the number of visitors at the bedside at any one time could be kept to a minimum. We recommend no more than two visitors. We also ask that visitors do not sit on, or put personal items on, any hospital beds

- If children are visiting, it is important that they are kept under close supervision and observation. Please do not allow children to run around the ward or to crawl or play on the floor
- Visitors should be discouraged from touching wound dressings, drips or drains when visiting

Frequently asked questions

How did I catch MRSA?

It is often not possible to say exactly where somebody caught MRSA.

Some people may pick up the bacteria in wounds or may have developed their 'own strain' of MRSA from having lots of different antibiotics, especially if they did not complete the course.

Will MRSA stop me having my treatment?

If you are already in hospital, your treatments will carry on as normal and you may be asked to use special antiseptics and cream to try to clear the MRSA from your body. This is necessary to protect you from becoming ill during your treatment or prevent you from passing MRSA onto other patients.

It may be sometimes safer to delay your treatment temporarily while an infection or colonisation is treated. Your doctor will discuss this with you if this is the case.



How will I know when the MRSA is gone?

If an infection is improving or has gone completely, we would consider that treatment is being effective. The only way to know if the MRSA has gone is if the swabs or specimens give negative laboratory results.

It is important to know that every patient's circumstances are different and to be aware that it may not be always possible to clear MRSA colonisation.

Can my MRSA come back?

MRSA can sometimes come back, especially if you have been unwell or have had courses of antibiotics.

If you need to come into hospital, you will be screened again and may be asked to use the special antiseptics until we find out your screening results.

If you are unwell or having an operation, it is important to tell any doctors or healthcare professionals that you have had MRSA in the past. This is because the doctors may need to prescribe antibiotics to protect you from developing an infection.

Is there a risk to my family?

MRSA can affect people who have certain long-term health problems so, if you have specific concerns about visitors, please discuss it with the staff looking after you. Generally, MRSA does not harm healthy people, including pregnant women, children and babies. You can continue to have normal social contact, such as shaking hands or kissing with your friends and family.

Some people are worried about asking family and friends to take soiled or used clothing home to wash. Special laundry bags are available on request from your ward nurse. Relatives/carers can put the bags straight into the washing machine and they will only open once the wash cycle has begun. MRSA can be destroyed easily outside the body at normal washing temperatures and the germs removed with detergent and water.

Will I have to stay in hospital longer?

Many of the antibiotics used to treat MRSA can only be given by injection so, if you have an infection caused by MRSA, you might need to stay in hospital for treatment until the infection improves.

If you are colonised with MRSA, you do not need to stay in hospital any longer than normal. It is important that you finish your clearance therapy at home if you have not finished the course in hospital.

Who can I speak to if I have further questions?

Please speak to any of the ward staff caring for you.

The Infection Prevention and Control Team will listen confidentially to any comments and complaints so that we can learn from any mistakes and improve still further. You may write to us at the hospital or, if you would like to speak to an infection prevention and control nurse, you can contact us directly or your ward nurse can arrange a meeting.



Infection Prevention and Control Nurses
The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre NHS Foundation Trust
Clatterbridge Road
Bebington
Wirral
CH63 4JY
Telephone: 0151 556 5726

Other sources of information

Ward staff will be able to provide you with leaflets regarding specific infections and generic infection prevention and control.

Official Websites

Public Health England display information about many different infections. You can access this information using the A-Z function on their website at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england>.

How we produce our information

All of our leaflets are produced by staff at The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre and this information is not sponsored or influenced in any way. Every effort is made to ensure that the information included in this leaflet is accurate and complete and we hope that it will add to any professional advice you have had. All our leaflets are evidence based where appropriate and they are regularly reviewed and updated. If you are concerned about your health in any way, you should consult your healthcare team.

We rely on a number of sources to gather evidence for our information. All of our information is in line with accepted national or international guidelines where possible. Where no guidelines exist, we rely on other reliable sources such as systematic reviews, published clinical trials data or a consensus review of experts. We also use medical textbooks, journals and government publications.

References for this leaflet can be obtained by telephoning 0151 556 5570.

If you need this leaflet in large print, Braille, audio or different language, please call 0151 556 5570.

If you have a comment, concern, compliment or complaint, please call 0151 556 5203.

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