

There will be full instructions on how to apply the ointment and liquid within the pack you receive. The aim of the suppression protocol is to reduce the amount of MRSA on your skin to the lowest possible levels at the time of your operation or during your hospital stay.

Does anything else happen if I am found to be MRSA positive and I am having an operation? Yes. You will be asked to come into hospital as close to your operation as possible. You will be given targeted antibiotics before your operation. You may be admitted to a side room or isolation bay rather than onto an open ward. If your operation is cancelled a nurse will advise you whether or not you need to repeat the MRSA suppression protocol.

How can MRSA be prevented from spreading to other patients? Patients with MRSA are cared for by nurses wearing aprons and gloves. All staff and visitors are asked to wash their hands or use alcohol rub before and after contact with all patients MRSA positive or not.

Can I have visitors during my hospital stay? Yes including pregnant women and children. Visitors do not need to wear protective clothing. Visitors should be encouraged not to visit other patients, wards and departments. Visitors must wash their hands before and after visiting time and after any direct patient contact. Only visitors with a severe skin condition or open wounds may be at extra risk and should discuss their condition with the nursing staff or their GP before visiting someone with MRSA.

Any further questions?

If you have any further questions please feel free to contact the Infection Control Team on 020 7288 3261, or you can ask the ward manager to contact us. The Health protection agency website also provides additional information on www.hpa.org.uk/

Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)

If you have a compliment, complaint or concern please contact our PALS team on 020 7288 5551 or whh-tr.whitthealthPALS@nhs.net

If you need a large print, audio or translated copy of this leaflet please contact us on 020 7288 3182. We will try our best to meet your needs.

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Date published: 27/03/2019
Review date: 27/03/2021
Ref: GEN/NPE/IPCSMRSA/02

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Infection Prevention & Control

Screening for MRSA

A patient's guide



What is MRSA?

MRSA stands for Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus.

What does this mean?

Staphylococcus aureus sometimes called 'staph' are bacteria found on the skin or in the nose of healthy people. Occasionally, it may cause infection. Skin pimples and boils are examples of minor infections caused by staph. These infections can be easily treated with antibiotics, such as penicillin's. However, staph bacteria sometimes can cause more serious infections, such as surgical wound infections. Over the last fifty years it has become more difficult to treat these infections because the bacteria have become resistant to common antibiotics including penicillin. These resistant forms of staph bacteria are known as MRSA.

MRSA is now widespread in many UK hospitals together with many areas worldwide. MRSA is neither more infectious nor worse than other Staphylococcus aureus bacteria; it is just more difficult to treat.

Is MRSA always a problem?

No, not always. Staph bacteria and MRSA can be found on the skin and in the nose of some people without causing illness. This is called 'colonisation' and individuals are called carriers'. Approximately 25-30 percent of the population are carriers and they are healthy and unaffected by the MRSA. Colonisation can be minimised by using skin antiseptics.

An infection may occur when there are breaks in the skin, such as an operation site, and the MRSA gets beneath the top layer of skin and grows, causing symptoms. These infections generally require treatment with special antibiotics.

How do you acquire MRSA?

Commonly MRSA is passed on by hand contact. A person picks up MRSA by touching another person or surface contaminated with MRSA. This is because MRSA survives well in the environment in skin scales and dust.

Why screen patients for MRSA carriage?

All patients coming into our hospital we try to screen all our pre-operative patients prior to admission. We also screen our emergency adult admissions. If you have MRSA you are at no higher risk of an infection than any other patient coming in to hospital. However if you do get an infection it is more likely to be an MRSA infection, which is more difficult to treat. This screen will help us detect if you carry MRSA. We will give all MRSA positive patients skin antiseptics to reduce the amount of skin colonisation and possibility of an MRSA infection. This protocol also helps reduce the risk of spread to other patients on the ward.

When and how will I be screened?

If you are a planned admission, you will be screened for MRSA about 3-4 weeks before the expected date of your operation. If you are an emergency admission you will be screened in emergency department.

The nurses will use wet cotton tipped swabs to screen your nose and throat for MRSA. If you have any old surgical wounds or broken skin areas, these will also be swabbed. The swabs are sent off to the Microbiology Laboratory and a result is usually available within 4 working days. If you do not receive a result you can assume you are MRSA negative. If you are MRSA positive the pre-assessment nurse will call you and your GP will also be informed.

Can it spread to others?

The main risk is to other patients. Friends and family are very unlikely to get MRSA, especially if they wash their hands after patient contact. Visitors with a severe skin condition, or open wounds may be at extra risk of infection, and should discuss their condition with the ward sister or their GP before visiting someone with MRSA.

How can MRSA be prevented from spreading to other patients?

By keeping your hands clean: -wash thoroughly with soap and water or using the alcohol hand rub provided on the ward.

What happens if I am found to be MRSA positive?

You will be given a MRSA suppression protocol pack for home or whilst you are in hospital. If you live far away we can organise for your GP to give you a prescription. This is a nose ointment and a separate liquid for use as soap daily and shampoo as directed for the five days to commence once you have the pack.