

MRSA

This information leaflet is for patients, relatives and carers. It explains what MRSA is, how it affects us, how it spreads and what we can do to stop it spreading. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to the staff member in charge of your care.

What is MRSA?

MRSA stands for Meticillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*. This means that Meticillin (an antibiotic) does not kill this bacterium. Therefore infections with MRSA can be harder to treat with antibiotics. However, the majority of patients who develop an MRSA infection are successfully treated with different antibiotics.

It is normal for healthy people to have bacteria (germs) on their skin. One of the most common types of bacterium is *Staphylococcus aureus*. One in three people have this bacterium in their noses and on their skin, without it causing any harm. In a small number of people this *Staphylococcus aureus* germ will be resistant to the antibiotic methicillin.

Most people with MRSA carry it without any harm to themselves or their family. This is called colonisation. However it can sometimes cause serious infections, especially if it gets into a wound. This is why we try to stop the spread of MRSA in hospitals and to vulnerable patients in the community.

How does MRSA spread?

Healthcare settings should always be clean, although there is very little evidence that a dirty environment causes the spread of MRSA.

MRSA is mainly spread on our hands, when we touch other people or surfaces although equipment and clothing can help to spread it too. MRSA can also travel through the air if people have MRSA in their sputum (phlegm) or very flaky dry skin (skin scales). This is why hand hygiene is so important. Please do ask staff if they have cleaned their hands.

If you have MRSA you may have acquired it either in the community or during an admission to hospital or nursing home. Approximately one third of our inpatients found to have MRSA acquired the bacterium before admission to hospital.

Can MRSA harm family and friends visiting patients in hospital?

All visitors should clean their hands before and after every visit. This should be the case whether the person you are visiting has MRSA or not. If your friend or relative has MRSA, you do not need to put on gloves and an apron unless you are giving or assisting with personal care; hand-hygiene is all that is needed. Never touch a wound or device such as a drip or catheter.

You should ask the nurse in charge for advice if you have a serious health condition and want to visit a patient with MRSA or if you have MRSA and want to visit another patient.

MRSA should not put you at risk if you are a healthy person. It does not usually affect pregnant women, children, babies or elderly people. However it can affect people with serious health conditions, chronic skin problems or open wounds.

How do we look after patients with MRSA in hospital?

If you have MRSA, healthcare workers will care for you using additional precautions, such as gloves and an apron. You may be moved to a room on your own, where doors to rooms are closed to prevent spread of the bacterium, or a separate bay for people with MRSA.

We might give you a special cream, powder and washes to get rid of the bacteria, if appropriate (decolonisation). We might also give you antibiotics if you have an infection as a result of having MRSA. After treatment we will take swabs from different sites on your body to see if the MRSA has gone.

If you have MRSA it is unlikely that you will be prevented from having treatment and tests. However in rare situations, invasive procedures such as operations may be delayed to reduce any risks to your health until the MRSA has been treated.

Going home with MRSA

If you are otherwise well enough, your discharge date will not be delayed even if you are still carrying MRSA on your body. You may be given the decolonisation protocol to complete at home. MRSA is not a danger to healthy family, friends or the general public, so there are no special precautions. Hand washing and keeping your house clean in the usual way are all that you need. Wash your clothes and bed linen at normal temperatures and iron them, if possible.

Coming back to hospital

If you have MRSA and you come back into hospital, it is important to tell the nurses and doctors that you have had MRSA. We may admit you to a side room if available and will screen you for MRSA (by taking swabs) to check if it is still present.

What is the Trust doing to prevent MRSA infections?

The Infection Prevention and Control Team monitors MRSA closely and carefully, giving advice to staff on how to prevent its spread. It's very important that we do everything we can to stop MRSA spreading, which might mean that patients in hospital have to move beds several times. This might be the case even if you do not have MRSA yourself. Most patients are now tested for MRSA in pre-admission clinics and on admission to hospital. If the tests are found to be positive, you will be given treatment prior to your operation, if possible.

All staff should clean their hands before and after touching patients. Staff will wear gloves and aprons when caring for patients with MRSA. Patients with MRSA may be moved to a room on their own or a bay for people with MRSA.

Tips to help prevent the spread of MRSA

- 1 **Please don't hesitate to ask staff** if they have cleaned their hands before they treat or attend to you.
- 2 **Good hygiene** is one of the best ways of tackling MRSA. Clean your hands at regular intervals throughout the day.
- 3 **Ask visitors to clean their hands** using the hand rub before and after every visit.
- 4 **Do not sit on other patients' beds** and do not let any visitors sit on yours. Please use chairs provided.
- 5 **Keep the area around your bed clutter free.** This allows us to clean the area more effectively.

Further information

If you would like more information, please ask the nursing or medical staff.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about MRSA, please contact Infection Prevention and Control on 020 8725 2459 (Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 4.30pm).

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111

