

# ***MRSA (Methicillin resistant Staphylococcus aureus)*** ***Your questions answered (1 of 4)***



## **What do the initials MRSA stand for?**

The initials stand for Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA).

## **What is Staphylococcus aureus?**

Staphylococcus aureus is a common germ that lives completely harmlessly on the skin and in the nose of around one third of people.

It is more common on skin that is broken, for example, if you have a cut, a sore, or a rash such as eczema.

These germs are so small that they cannot be seen by the naked eye and a microscope is needed to see them.

## **What is MRSA?**

MRSA is a staphylococcus germ which has become more resistant to treatment and so it is not killed by more commonly used antibiotics.

## **How does it affect me?**

People who have MRSA do not look or feel different from other patients. Usually, nothing is visible and if it is just on your skin you may not notice any physical difference.

In some people MRSA can cause infections which may delay the healing process.

## **How did I catch MRSA?**

It is usually passed on by human contact. Although it can live in dust, MRSA prefers to live on people i.e. on the skin, usually in the nose, groin, armpits and wounds.

You may have had it on your skin before you came into hospital.

It will do little or no harm unless it gets inside the body when it may cause problems.

## **Is MRSA an infection?**

MRSA is not an infection. It is a bacteria that can cause infections and may delay healing if it gets into a wound.

**Infection Prevention & Control Team**

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The evidence used in the preparation of this leaflet is available on request. Please email: [patient.information@salisbury.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@salisbury.nhs.uk) if you would like a reference list.

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Role: Infection Control  
Date written: Feb 2002  
Review date: January 2021  
Version: 2.1  
Code: PO0114

## **How is it identified?**

A specimen (a swab) is taken and sent to the laboratory to be examined.

If present, it usually takes up to 3 days for the germ to grow and for the result to be reported in the laboratory. You will be told the result by the doctors or nurses looking after you.

If a patient in your ward area gets MRSA you may also have swabs taken.

## **Can MRSA be treated?**

Yes - usually very successfully by prescribed ointments, washes or antibiotics. The treatment depends on how widespread the MRSA is.

If you have MRSA on your skin, hair or nose, you may be given antiseptic body wash and hair shampoo, and antibiotic cream for your nose.

If you have a local infection such as an infected wound or a serious infection, you may be treated with antibiotics that kill MRSA.

## **How does MRSA change the way that I will be looked after?**

MRSA affects the way that we look after patients. It can be treated with some drugs, but these drugs may be more difficult to use or may cause side effects more often than some of the other drugs that are used to treat infections.

We take steps to prevent MRSA spreading to other patients and you may be moved to a single room.

## **How will I know when I am clear of MRSA?**

Following completion of your treatment for MRSA, 3 sets of swabs at 5 day intervals will be taken and if they are negative then precautions will be stopped.

Occasionally MRSA reappears on the skin after apparently successful treatment.

## **How long will I be kept in a single room?**

You will only be kept in a single room to prevent the spread of MRSA to other patients.

This decision is based on the time it takes to treat and clear a person of MRSA which can vary from person to person.

## **How long have I had MRSA?**

It is difficult to know - it may have been a few days, weeks or longer.

## **Will the treatment and outcome of my original condition be affected by MRSA?**

This is not likely but please discuss this with your doctor.

## **What can be done to help get rid of MRSA?**

- Please wash thoroughly with the special soap prescribed and put on fresh clothes after washing or bathing.
- Clean bed linen will be provided daily.
- Use disposable wash cloths and dispose of them after a single use.
- Towels should be changed daily.
- You can remind everyone who comes into your room to wash their hands before leaving.

## **Can visitors to the ward catch MRSA?**

All visitors should see the nurse in charge before visiting so that they can be given guidance and instruction on preventing the spread of MRSA.

All visitors must wash and dry their hands thoroughly before and after visiting the ward.

MRSA does not harm healthy people, including pregnant women, children and babies. It can affect people who have certain long-term health problems. Please ask if you are not sure this applies to your visitors.

While healthy people are at very little risk of catching MRSA, any visitors should keep any cuts covered with a waterproof dressing.

## **Can visitors spread MRSA?**

No, provided they follow all given instructions and wash and dry their hands before and after visiting.

If your visitors are visiting other hospital patients on the same day, it would be advisable that they see them first before they see you.

## **Will MRSA delay my going home?**

Probably not. If you are having treatment, arrangements may be made for the district nurse to visit and treat you.

Special ointment or washes may continue to be prescribed for a while after discharge.

## **What happens if I am admitted to hospital in the future?**

If you go into a hospital as a patient or have an outpatient appointment, you should always tell the staff that you have had MRSA.

Swabs will be taken to check for MRSA and you may be cared for in a single room.

## Additional Information

- As staff have to care for other patients they will be wearing a disposable apron and gloves when they come into your room. Wearing this protective clothing will help prevent the spread of MRSA to other patients.
- Your room will be cleaned daily by the housekeeping staff who will wear the same protective clothing as other staff.
- All staff will remove their protective clothing and wash their hands before leaving the room.
- Staff not in direct contact with you may not be wearing the protective clothing. This includes delivering and removing food and drink from your room.
- Your bed linen will be laundered separately as MRSA may be found in clothes and on bed linen.
- If you would like more information please ask your nurse or doctor.
- Staff may contact the Infection Prevention and Control Team for further advice.

## Where can I get more information about MRSA?

Data on MRSA infections in England and Wales are available via the Public Health England website [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england). They also have a leaflet on MRSA.