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HARLEY STREET CLINIC®

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MRSA
INFORMATION LEAFLET

WHAT IS MRSA?

MRSA stands for Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus aureus. Most Staphylococcus aureus are resistant to penicillin, and some strains are resistant to Methicillin as well as a few other antibiotics that are used to treat Staphylococcus aureus infections.

About one in three people carry Staphylococcus aureus on the surface of their skin, or in their nose, without causing any harm. People, who have MRSA on their bodies or in their noses but are unharmed by it, are described as being colonised.

Who is at risk of MRSA infection?

MRSA infections usually occur in hospitals and in particular to vulnerable or debilitated patients, such as patients in intensive care units, and on surgical wards. MRSA can cause problems when it gets the opportunity to enter the body, e.g. when the surface of the skin (that normally acts as a barrier to infection) is broken. This is more likely to happen to people who are already unwell. It may also be due to trauma or the need for you to have surgery, intravenous drips or other medical devices inserted. MRSA does not normally affect hospital staff or family members (unless they are suffering from a severe skin condition or debilitating disease). In general, healthy people are at a low risk of infection with MRSA.

What illnesses are caused by MRSA?

MRSA can cause abscesses, boils and can infect wounds - accidental wounds such as grazes and deliberate wounds such as those made for a drip or during surgery. These are called localised infections. It may then spread into the body and cause serious infections such as septicaemia (blood poisoning).

How is MRSA spread?

MRSA is most commonly spread via hands, equipment, and sometimes the environment. It is important that healthcare workers and visitors wash their hands before and after visiting a patient. Provided hands are not soiled (when they should be washed with soap and water), rapid acting alcohol hand rubs are now advocated in healthcare: they are easier and faster to use than hand washing and more accessible. Equipment should also be cleaned after use and in between patients.

How do I know if I am carrying MRSA?

You will be screened for MRSA, either prior to admission as an elective patient, or on admission if this is unplanned. You may also be screened regularly during your admission. Screening for MRSA is a simple procedure that is painless. Swabs are taken from your nostrils, armpits (axilla) and groin area. One swab is used for both nostrils, one swab used for both axilla and one swab for both groin. Some units may undertake additional swabs such as throat or hairline.

What happens if my MRSA screen is positive or I get an MRSA infection?

If you are found to be MRSA positive then you will be informed by the nursing staff and advised of the treatment required. You may be prescribed a five day course of antiseptic skincare products that can be used to tackle MRSA. The products are:

- A body foam/wash and shampoo
- An ointment for putting inside your nostrils; and

- if you have a localised or more serious MRSA infection then you are likely to be prescribed antibiotics.

Precautions are also put into place to prevent the spread of the organism from patient to patient, this includes your single room.

How do I apply the treatment to my nose?

MRSA can be found inside the nose so you need to use nasal ointment. Place a small amount (about the size of a match stick head) on your little finger or cotton bud and apply to the inside of your nose. Press the sides of the nose together – this will help to spread the ointment in the nose, this is repeated up to three times a day depending on the ointment prescribed so please check the packet information.

How is the wash applied to my skin?

You will need to use the body wash/foam daily for 5 days. Please read the instructions provided with the product carefully and apply as instructed. Do not use the same cloth or towel every day, these need to be changed daily. When using the above treatment bedding, towels and clothing should be changed daily.

Can a patient with MRSA have visitors and are there any extra precautions they should take?

MRSA does not normally cause harm to healthy people, including pregnant women, children and babies. Your visitors should cover any cuts with a waterproof plaster and ensure they wash their hands using the clinical hand wash basins provided or use the hand sanitisers, before and after visiting you. Visitors do not need to wear gloves and aprons unless providing care for you such as assistance with personal hygiene. Your visitors should not visit any other patients in the hospital. If visitors have any concerns they should discuss this with the nurse in charge.

Will I have to stay longer in hospital because I have MRSA?

Most patients who are colonised with MRSA do not usually have to stay in hospital longer. However, If you have a local infection or a serious infection your hospital stay may be extended until the clinical team are happy for you to be discharged.

If I am due to be discharged, will the MRSA delay me going home?

No, it should not delay your discharge home, once the clinical teams are happy for your discharge. You are not infectious to family and friends or other people with whom you have social contact.

Will I need treatment for MRSA when I go home?

If you are colonised with MRSA, you may be treated, particularly if you are likely to be re-admitted to the hospital. If you have a local MRSA infection, you may need to continue treatment when you go home.

If you go to hospital for some reason as an inpatient or outpatient it would be greatly appreciated if you could inform the staff that you have had MRSA in the past.

What is the cause of the rise in MRSA infections in the UK?

The rise in MRSA infections in the UK is likely to be multi-factorial. The new strains that emerged in the 1990s may be more virulent (i.e. more likely to cause infections) than some of their predecessors, or more easily spread on the hands of healthcare workers, equipment, and perhaps via the environment. There are also a number of factors that aid in the spread of MRSA in hospitals such as: patient transfers within and between hospitals and the increasing number of very ill patients seen in hospital.

The increasing complexity of healthcare and medical intervention also add to the risk of acquiring MRSA.

Further information

The team at the hospital offer guidance in accordance with Department of Health best practice recommendations. If you would like any advice about infection prevention and control please call **020 7935 7700** and ask to speak to the Infection Control Lead.



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