

More information about MRSA

You can find more in depth information about MRSA by visiting the Health Protection Agency website at www.hpa.org.uk

The Department of Health has published 'A simple guide to MRSA' which is available at www.dh.gov.uk

If you have any questions about MRSA and our infection control policies, please contact the hospital and staff will arrange for a member of the Infection Control Team to get in touch with you.

MRSA Screening

Information for Patients



Patients may be concerned about how MRSA affects their treatment and about the measures taken to prevent its spread.

Screening for the presence of MRSA is a precautionary step which can prove vital as many patients entering hospitals have been shown to be carrying MRSA. If you are positive for MRSA then we can take measures both to protect you and others from infection with MRSA.

This leaflet addresses the most commonly asked questions about MRSA screening and includes a list of sources for further and more detailed information.

What is MRSA and what can it do?

Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) is a germ found both in hospitals and in the community. It can be carried harmlessly on the skin and in the noses of many people without causing an infection. It is carried more easily on skin that is broken; for example where there is a rash, a cut or a sore. It can, however, cause abscesses, boils and sometimes wound infections, particularly in people who are already unwell.

Why is identifying MRSA important?

Special care is taken with MRSA germs when they are found on patients in hospital, because the germs are resistant to some commonly used antibiotics. MRSA may then be more difficult to treat if it does cause an infection.

For the majority of patients and hospital staff, it poses no threat to health.

How does it spread?

MRSA may be carried in the nose and other body sites of anyone without causing problems. The germs can spread easily from one person to another by the hands or clothes and then passed on to the next person they touch. Careful hand washing and use of alcohol gels by patients, the staff and visitors and good house keeping to control dust is important and helps to prevent the germ spreading.

How can you tell who has MRSA?

Patients carrying MRSA do not look or feel different, so it can be found only by growing the germ in a laboratory from swabs taken from skin and wounds.

Benefits of screening

For those who carry MRSA, it can be treated by the use of antibiotics and skin treatments.

The only way of knowing who is carrying MRSA is to take swabs of certain body sites that are likely to carry MRSA (these may include nose, axilla, groin and wounds). A cotton bud will be used to take a sample. This will not hurt you and takes only a few minutes. This process is called MRSA Screening and will be carried out by the health care worker at the pre-operative assessment clinic or Out Patient Department.

Identifying patients with MRSA and treating them reduces the risk of this infection following surgery.

Who is screened?

1. Patients who are going to have operations including orthopaedic, neurosurgery and cardiac surgery
2. Patients who are going to have other surgical procedures considered as high risk
3. Patients who are transferred from one hospital to another, or from one ward to another
4. Patients who have had MRSA infections in the past or have skin disorders or slow to heal wounds
5. Patients who have been living in care homes
6. Patients who are already in hospital and may have been in contact with somebody who is found to have MRSA
7. Patients who are healthcare workers

If MRSA is identified

If a patient is found to be carrying MRSA, then they will require treatment. This could mean delaying the operation.

You may also have treatment when you come into the hospital for your surgery and may be given specific antibiotics which will reduce the risk of infection following surgery/procedure.

What does the treatment involve?

The treatment can consist of a liquid soap for washing, a powder for the skin and an ointment for the nose.

This can be completed whilst you are at home before you are admitted for your operation.

If you develop an infection whilst you are in hospital then antibiotics may be required.