

## More information

The Department of Health has published 'A simple guide to MRSA' and 'A simple guide to Clostridium Difficile' available at [www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk)

You can find more in depth information about Hospital Associated Infection (HAI) by visiting the Health Protection Agency website at [www.hpa.org.uk](http://www.hpa.org.uk)

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

People caring for people



# Healthcare Associated Infection (HAI)

information for patients



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

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

## What is Healthcare Associated Infection?

Healthcare Associated Infection (HAI) refers to an infection that a patient may acquire as a result of treatment in a hospital, a GP's surgery or even following treatment in a patient's own home. Certain patients, such as the elderly, the very young or patients with diabetes, kidney failure, cancer or those undergoing particular types of surgery can be more susceptible to certain infections. Often, the type of bacteria that cause infections, live on the skin and are usually harmless. Unfortunately, patients undergoing any treatment may have a lower resistance to these bacteria, which can gain entry to the body through wounds, drains or catheters etc and cause an infection.

## MRSA

Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) is a germ found both in hospitals and in the community. It can be carried harmlessly 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. MRSA 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 infections, particularly in people who are already unwell.

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.

## How is MRSA treated?

People who get MRSA can be treated. If a patient carries MRSA, a nurse may take swabs to check which parts of the body have MRSA. Treatment with antiseptic shampoo, powder or cream will be given.

A patient who has an MRSA infection is usually treated with antibiotics.

## C Diff

The gut of healthy people contains bacteria that usually cause no harm. Clostridium Difficile (C Diff) is one of the bacteria that may be present in small numbers. C Diff rarely causes problems in children or healthy adults, as it is kept in check by the normal bacterial population of the intestine. When certain antibiotics disturb the balance of normal bacteria, Clostridium Difficile can multiply rapidly and cause illness.

An increase of Clostridium Difficile irritates the gut lining. Diarrhoea is the most common symptom. However, abdominal pain, fever, loss of appetite and sickness may also be present.

## How does C Diff spread?

It is possible for the infection to spread from person to person because those suffering from C Diff shed spores in their faeces.

Spores can survive for a very long time and can be transported on the hands of infected patients or people who have had direct contact with them. The spores can also contaminate the general environment including surfaces and equipment and if picked up on hands, and then from hand to mouth, can be transferred into the gut.

## How is C Diff treated?

Clostridium Difficile is usually treated with specific antibiotics. Once the diarrhoea stops, this usually indicates that the infection is gone. There is a risk of recurrence; if this happens, other treatments may be carried out.

## Prevention and control

All of our Hospitals have strict nursing and cleaning procedures which reduce the risk of infection to very low levels. Another significant factor in reducing risk is that we can offer single rooms with en suite facilities to almost all of our patients. If a patient is found to be a carrier, or have an infection, careful precautions are put in place to prevent it's spread. In certain circumstances an operation or treatment may have to be deferred until treatment has been given.

Screening for the presence of MRSA is another precautionary step which can prove vital as many patients entering hospitals have been shown to be carrying MRSA. If they are identified in advance, they can be treated in isolation.