

MRSA Factsheet

Information for community service users and the general public

What is MRSA?

- MRSA stands for Meticillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*.
- MRSA is a type of bacteria (germ) which has been around for many years, it was first identified in the 1960s.
- It is carried harmlessly by people in their nose or on their skin.
- We all carry lots of bacteria and usually it doesn't cause a problem. But when a person goes into hospital carrying MRSA and has a procedure that involved breaking the skin, then the MRSA can get in to the body and may cause an infection.
- Infections are usually treated with antibiotics, but MRSA has become resistant to a group of antibiotics called Meticillin. MRSA can be treated with some other sorts of antibiotics.
- It is important to remember that MRSA is not usually a health concern for those people who are fit and well.
- Less than 1% of people have MRSA.

What problems can MRSA cause?

- People carrying the MRSA bacteria on their skin are said to be colonised, but not infected. The MRSA bacteria are simply 'hitching a ride' on the surface of the body and have not got inside the body tissues or blood stream.
- When the MRSA bacteria are simply being carried on the surface of the skin, they are not usually harmful to a healthy person. Because of this, most people are never aware that they are carrying the bacteria.
- MRSA bacteria can become harmful and cause an infection if it gets into the body, usually through a surgical wound or chronic wound, e.g. leg ulcer, or indwelling device such as a urinary catheter.

How is it spread?

- Usually spread from person-to-person by direct skin contact or by contaminated equipment or surfaces.
- MRSA can 'hitch a ride' to the next person on hands not washed thoroughly.

MRSA treatment?

- When MRSA is causing an infection, appropriate antibiotics will be prescribed.
- People carrying the MRSA bacteria on their skin do not usually need treatment.

How can MRSA be prevented?

- Thorough handwashing is extremely important using liquid soap and warm running water. Strict attention should be paid to handwashing and everyone who has contact with a person with MRSA should wash their hands thoroughly.
- Do not hesitate to remind health care staff and visitors to wash their hands, or use an alcohol handrub.
- It is important to wash your hands thoroughly before and after touching your wound.
- Linen and clothing should be washed on the hottest wash cycle that the fabric will withstand.
- MRSA can be killed by detergent and household disinfectants. A good standard of cleaning helps to prevent MRSA.

Can MRSA be passed on to relatives and friends?

- MRSA is not usually a health concern for those people who are fit and well, including pregnant women, children and babies.
- Family and friends should not be restricted from visiting.
- Visitors should wash their hands thoroughly on arrival and when leaving.

Can social events be attended?

- Yes, it is important that a person with MRSA does not restrict their social life. It is **not** a risk to healthy people.

What happens if a person with MRSA is admitted to hospital?

- A person admitted to hospital with MRSA may be nursed in single room accommodation.
- Screening swabs will be taken to check if MRSA is present and if so, suppression treatment may be given. This is a five day treatment of an antibacterial washing lotion and an ointment to be applied inside the nose. The aim of this treatment is to reduce the number of MRSA bacteria on the skin, reducing the possibility of developing an MRSA infection.