

PATIENT INFORMATION

MRSA Screening for Emergency Admissions

What is MRSA?

Micro-organisms (germs, bacteria) are all around us but the only way we can see them is through a microscope.

We all carry millions of them both on and inside our bodies. They generally do us no harm at all - in fact most bacteria protect us from infections. However sometimes they can cause infections.

Staphylococcus aureus is a type of bacteria carried harmlessly by approximately 30% of the population, usually in the nostrils, throat or on the skin. A small proportion of these people carry a type of Staphylococcus aureus that has become resistant to some antibiotics. This is **MRSA**, which stands for **Meticillin Resistant Staphylococcus aureus**. This is a Staphylococcus aureus bacterium that can no longer be treated by some commonly used antibiotics. It is no more likely to cause infection than an "ordinary" Staphylococcus aureus.

If you are **colonised** with MRSA this means that the MRSA is present on the skin or in the nose but doing no harm to the person.

MRSA can cause harm when it gets the opportunity to enter the body. It can cause mild local infections such as pimples or boils or more serious infection such as chest infections, wound infections or blood infections.

Why Screen?

South Devon Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust is committed to reducing MRSA. As part of the admission process, all patients will be routinely screened for MRSA. This helps to prevent the spread of the germ to other patients and reduces the risk of complications for you, if you are found to be a carrier.

In line with the Department of Health's guidance, we will be screening you for MRSA on admission to hospital.

What is Screening?

Screening consists of taking swabs from certain areas on your body where we know MRSA can be carried even if there are no signs of infection.

Swab samples will be taken from your nose, throat and groin area, and damaged areas of skin if you have them. There is a small chance that the swabs taken may fail to identify the MRSA bacteria even if you are a carrier. This may happen if the number of MRSA bacteria present on your body is very small or it is present in a body site that has not been swabbed. It is possible that if you are swabbed again in the future MRSA may be identified.

What if my screen is positive to MRSA?

If you are identified as carrying MRSA, a member of the nursing staff on the ward will inform you and suppression therapy maybe commenced. This is a five day course of antiseptic skin solution and ointment to the nose, to reduce the levels of bacteria.

Reducing the number of MRSA bacteria on the skin reduces the chances of an MRSA infection. It also helps lower the risk of MRSA spreading to other patients. Some patients may even lose the MRSA completely following suppression treatment, but this is not common and is difficult to prove.

If my Screen is positive will the staff treat me differently?

No! We do not discriminate against patients who have MRSA. You will be given the same treatments regardless of whether you are known to be carrying MRSA or not. The only difference is that staff will wear aprons and gloves when they have direct contact with you. If you are an inpatient you may be cared for in a single room. This is to try to reduce the chances of spreading MRSA to other hospital patients who have open wounds. We do not expect you to take these sorts of precautions when you go home. Staff will also wash their hands or use the alcohol hand gel before and after caring for you, as they would after caring for any patient.

Can MRSA harm family and friends?

MRSA does not usually harm healthy people, including elderly people pregnant women, children and babies. If you have any concerns regarding friends or family who have long term health problems please contact the infection control team for advice.

At home we would encourage you to continue as normal with no special precautions. We will inform your GP so that, if you develop an infection in the future, the correct antibiotics will be prescribed.

Remember - this bacterium has been around for many years in the community causing no harm at all.

If you have not heard from us in 3 days then your result has come back as MRSA below detectable levels and no further action needs to be taken.

If you have any questions about the information in this leaflet, please contact:

The Infection Control Support Department

☎ Tel. (01803) 655757 and speak to one of the Infection Control Nurses

References:

- Coia J.E. et al (2006). Guidelines for the control and prevention of meticillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) in healthcare facilities
- Joint BSAC/HIS/ICNA UK Working Party Journal of Hospital Infection 2006 Supplements, Revised Guidelines for the Control of Meticillin – Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* in Healthcare facilities CNO / Director General NHS letter (2008). “MRSA screening – operational guidance” Gateway Ref No 10324

For further assistance or to receive this information in a different format, please contact the department which created this leaflet.