

MRSA

Meticillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus



Information for Patients and Visitors 2006

STOP THE SPREAD OF INFECTIONS

Proper hand cleaning is one of the most effective ways to prevent the spread of infections.

So the next time you visit a relative or friend in a hospital or a nursing home, the first thing you should do when you arrive is clean your hands. If you need help, ask a member of staff. Healthcare workers should also clean their hands before and after attending to each patient.



EVERYBODY IS RESPONSIBLE

Clean your hands - say no to infection!

WHAT IS MRSA?

MRSA stands for meticillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*. *Staphylococcus aureus* (pronounced staf-ill-okok-us or ee-us), or “Staph aureus” for short. It is a common germ that lives completely harmlessly on the skin or in the nose of about one in three people. MRSA is a type of *Staph aureus* that has become resistant to a number of different antibiotics.

Most people who carry MRSA on their bodies or in their noses don't suffer any ill effects. Carrying the germ harmlessly like this is called “colonisation”. However MRSA sometimes causes infections if it enters the body. This is more likely to happen to people who are already unwell, particularly those who are in hospital with a serious illness. Most MRSA infections are called “local” infections, such as boils, abscesses or infected wounds. These are easily treated. In a small number of people, however, MRSA can cause serious infections such as septicaemia (also known as “bloodstream infection” or “blood poisoning”).

HOW CAN YOU TELL IF SOMEONE HAS MRSA?

Most people with MRSA carry the germ harmlessly and have no ill effects. Patients who have an infection caused by MRSA do not look or feel any different to patients who have infections caused by other germs. The only way to tell if someone is carrying MRSA, or has an infection caused by MRSA, is to do a laboratory test on a sample from a wound, blood, urine, nose, or other part of the body. If MRSA is found in a sample it means that the person has MRSA on their body.

HOW DO PEOPLE GET MRSA?

The people most at risk of getting MRSA are those who have been in hospital for a long time, or have a lot of contact with hospitals, or have a long-term illness, or have had a lot of antibiotics. In the hospital, MRSA may be passed from one person to another on the hands of staff or visitors, by patient care equipment, or by contamination of the hospital environment. MRSA is most likely to spread where there is overcrowding and where a lot of antibiotics are used.

HOW DOES HAVING MRSA AFFECT A PERSON'S CARE IN HOSPITAL?

Even though most people with MRSA carry the germ harmlessly, hospitals take steps to stop the spread of MRSA to other people so that the risk of serious MRSA infections is reduced.

Patients in hospital who are carrying MRSA may be cared for in a single room on their own, or may be cared for with other people with MRSA in a particular ward area. Some patients who are carrying MRSA may also be given antiseptic body and hair shampoo and an antiseptic cream for their nose to try and get rid of the germ. Extra swabs may be taken from the nose and other parts of the body after this treatment, to see if MRSA is still present. If a person has an infection caused by MRSA they are treated with antibiotics, usually given intravenously, i.e. by a 'drip'.

CAN FAMILY AND FRIENDS VISIT A PERSON IN HOSPITAL WITH MRSA?

MRSA does not harm healthy people, including pregnant women, children and babies. MRSA rarely if ever presents a danger to the general public so friends and family can visit normally. Visitors will be asked to clean their hands after visiting a person with MRSA, so that they do not spread MRSA to other people.

If the family help to physically care for a person in hospital with MRSA, nursing staff will tell them of any extra precautions that may need to be taken.

CAN PATIENTS GO HOME WITH MRSA?

Yes. Patients with MRSA will be allowed home when medically fit. Most people lose MRSA when they leave hospital and when antibiotics are stopped. Relatives including children and friends at home are not at risk from a patient with MRSA who has been discharged from hospital.

WHAT HAPPENS IF A PERSON WITH MRSA NEEDS TO BE RE-ADMITTED TO HOSPITAL?

A person who has had MRSA in the past will have swabs taken to see if they are still carrying MRSA. They may be nursed in a single room, until the results of these swabs are known.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

Patients in hospital and their relatives should not hesitate to ask medical or nursing staff for more information on MRSA. Further advice may also be sought from the hospital's infection prevention and control team.

*Further information on **MRSA** is also available from the following websites:*

www.hse.ie

The Health Service Executive Website

www.hpsc.ie

The Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) has a "Frequently Asked Questions" page on *Staph aureus* and MRSA in the "Topics A-Z" section of their website. Information on the current levels of MRSA, and other infections, in Ireland can also be found in the EARSS section of the HPSC website

www.hpa.org.uk

The UK Health Protection Agency has background information on MRSA in the "Topics A-Z" section of its website

www.cdc.gov

The US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) website has information on MRSA under its "A-Z Index"

www.amm.co.uk

The UK Association of Medical Microbiologists has a factsheet on MRSA available in the publications section of their website