
What is MRSA?

We all carry a huge number of different germs on our bodies, and most of these are helpful in protecting us from harmful ones.

Many people (almost 1 in 3 of the population) carry bacteria called *Staphylococcus aureus* that likes to live in warm moist areas such as the nostrils, armpits and groin. Such people are said to be colonised by *S aureus*. This means the bacteria are living on a person, but not causing an infection. It is more common on people with a cut, sore or a rash such as eczema. Usually, these germs are harmless and no treatment is needed. Sometimes they may multiply and cause boils or infections in cuts or other wounds, but the infection either clears itself or is easily treated with simple antibiotics.

MRSA stands for meticillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*. It is a type of the germ that has become resistant to many antibiotics normally used to treat infections. This has happened partly because antibiotics have not been used correctly over the last 30 years or so.

Is MRSA harmful?

MRSA is not a "superbug"! It is simply one particular variety of a common germ which many people carry without ill effects.

Just like ordinary *Staphylococcus aureus*, MRSA may cause more serious infections in hospital patients, particularly those in intensive care or burns units.

MRSA is extremely unlikely to cause problems in healthy people living at home.

People at risk are those who are already ill and therefore more likely to get any infection, so in the hospital it is very important to take steps to see that MRSA does not spread.

What should I do if a family member has MRSA?

Nothing special!

It is very important for everyone to realise that for healthy people MRSA poses no problems. People with MRSA can mix with others and participate in all their usual activities. Bedding and clothing should be laundered as normal for the fabric. Crockery and utensils can be washed in the normal manner.

If the person concerned is to be admitted to hospital or has an Out-Patient's appointment it is helpful to let the staff know in advance that they are colonised with MRSA, or have been in the past.

Extra caution may be necessary if another household member has open skin lesions, or any invasive device such as a bladder catheter. Soiled dressings should be placed in a plastic bag for disposal and hands washed thoroughly.

No special action is needed if a household member is a health care worker.

If the person with MRSA has an immune system that is not working properly discuss the situation with your district nurse or GP, or contact the Public Health Department.

How does MRSA spread?

Just like many other germs, the most common way that MRSA is spread is on people's hands. Hand washing is the most important way to prevent MRSA spreading to others.

Hand hygiene is particularly important before and after:

- ❖ any skin-to-skin contact with hospital patients
- ❖ helping to dress wounds
- ❖ touching catheters or catheter bags
- ❖ feeding the very young and elderly

Wash hands with soap and running warm water, ensuring that all surfaces (including web spaces, finger tips and thumbs which often get forgotten!) are covered. Rinse and dry thoroughly on a clean dry towel. Use hand cream to prevent your hands from becoming sore or chapped or else they will be more attractive to germs.

The germs can be spread from the nose and throat through coughing and sneezing.

MRSA can survive in dust, which is largely made up of dead human skin. All surfaces should be dusted regularly with a damp cloth to prevent the build up of dust.

Can it be treated?

In hospital it may be decided to treat MRSA with antibiotics. The type of treatment will depend on how much it has spread on the body. It may be in the form of antiseptic shampoo and powders or antibiotics.

If you visit someone in hospital who has MRSA they may be in a single room. Some antibiotics used to treat serious MRSA infections are very powerful and may cause side effects. It is important to cut back on their use by preventing the spread of MRSA.

In the community (including nursing & residential homes) where people are generally healthy good standards of hygiene will reduce the possibility of MRSA causing problems. Treatment to get rid of the MRSA is rarely needed unless it is causing health problems or someone is due to go into hospital to stay for a period of time.

Need further advice or information?

- ❖ NHS Inform www.nhsinform.co.uk
- ❖ NHS24 ☎ 111 www.nhs24.co.uk
- ❖ www.nhsborders.scot.nhs.uk
- ❖ Local health clinic or GP

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