

## IF I HAVE MRSA HOW CAN I PROTECT THOSE AROUND ME?

### If you're in hospital

- Bring in your own toiletries. Do not share
- Make regular and thorough hand washing part of your daily routine especially:
  - before eating or handling food
  - after using the toilet / commode
  - after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing
  - after handling rubbish
  - when hands look or feel dirty
- Keep your bedside table free from clutter. This makes cleaning easier
- Report anything that doesn't look clean.

### If you're receiving visitors

- Ask them to adhere to guidelines on how many visitors are expected at one time
- Make sure they wash their hands and use the cleansing gel / hand rub before and after they enter a ward
- Make sure they check with the nurse if they wish to bring in food or flowers
- Limit clutter and gifts - the less presents, food and magazines the easier it is to clean.

### At home

- If you're taking antibiotics make sure you finish the course even if you feel better
- Tell friends and family not to visit if they have immunity problems

- Make sure you, your visitors and carers wash their hands:
  - after using the toilet / changing nappies
  - after touching animals or animal waste
  - after handling rubbish
  - before and after preparing food and drinks
  - after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing
  - when hands look or feel dirty
- If you're having wounds dressed at home, keep pets away
- It's a good idea to wash clothing / bedding separately from the rest of the family's at the highest temperature the fabric will allow. Normal soap powder is fine.

### IT'S OK TO ASK

If you have any concerns about cleanliness, MRSA and how it is treated ask a healthcare professional, they can help put your mind at rest.

**Don't be frightened to ask your carers if they've washed their hands. They will expect it and by doing so you will be helping to control infection.**

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## WHAT IS MRSA?

a simple guide

You may have read about MRSA in newspapers. It is sometimes called a 'superbug'. This leaflet explains more about MRSA.

## WHAT IS MRSA?

We all carry bacteria on and in our bodies. MRSA (Meticillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus) is a bacteria which can cause infections. About three percent of us are carriers of MRSA. This is called colonisation and means it lives harmlessly on our skin and in our noses when we are healthy. There's no way of knowing if you are a carrier as there are no symptoms. It is not normally dangerous to the general public or people in their own homes but it can affect those who are ill.

Commonly MRSA causes boils, infected wounds, abscesses, bloodstream infection, chest infection and urine infection.

MRSA has become resistant to some antibiotics. There are two reasons this happens:

- a course of antibiotics is not finished as prescribed
- antibiotics are overused allowing the bacteria to develop a resistance.

## WHY IS MRSA SO WIDESPREAD NOW?

Although MRSA has been around since the 1960s there are a number of reasons it has become more widespread. These include:

- infections may have gone undiagnosed in previous years
- older people in our society are getting illnesses connected to long-term health problems which require antibiotics
- we treat illnesses, such as tonsillitis, with antibiotics, when given time the body can usually heal itself
- the bugs are becoming harder to treat with antibiotics as they find ways to resist medicine.

## HOW DO PEOPLE GET MRSA?

MRSA usually spreads from person to person when it can enter the body through a wound or break in the skin (ie where an intravenous drip is inserted).

Those that carry MRSA can:

- infect themselves by touching the drips or breaks in the skin
- pass it on to others by touching a wound or by handling equipment around them.

### MRSA can also be spread by:

- people coming into direct contact with carriers or those diagnosed with MRSA
- through indirect contact with individuals who have not washed their hands
- via indirect contact with a care environment that has not been properly cleaned.

It is important that our care environments are kept clean and staff are working hard to make sure that happens. However, we should all have clean hands regardless of whether in hospital or not.

## DID YOU KNOW?

- When you are receiving care from a healthcare professional they will clean their hands before they treat you
- Hospitals have been testing patients for MSRA for a number of years
- Over the next few years testing is being extended to cover more patients coming into hospital
- You may be tested if you are coming into hospital for a booked procedure or admission
- MRSA screening consists of a test which takes a swab from your nose and, in some cases, other areas as well. If you are found to have MSRA, a healthcare professional will decide the most appropriate plan for your care. If you decide that you don't want to be screened you will have the chance to discuss this prior to your test
- Not all patients with MSRA will need to be treated. This is because MSRA can live harmlessly on the skin of some people.

## IS MRSA TREATABLE?

**Yes.** If you are found to be a carrier, decolonisation treatment for MRSA includes antiseptic shampoo, powder and cream to help reduce or remove MRSA from hair, skin and nostrils.

Those who are infected with MRSA will be prescribed antibiotics from a doctor, which must be taken as directed. Treatment can take place in hospital or at home, a residential or care home.

## CLEAN HANDS

**Washing your hands with soap and clear running water for 30 seconds will go a long way to fighting infection.** When you wash your hands it is important to include palms, thumbs and fingers, including tips, and backs of hands. The recommended way of washing your hands is shown below.



1 Wet hands with water



6 Rub each thumb clasped in opposite hand using a rotational movement



2 Apply enough soap to cover all hand surfaces



7 Rub tips of fingers in opposite palm in circular motion



3 Rub hands palm to palm



8 Rub each wrist with opposite hand



4 Rub back of each hand with palm of other hand with fingers interlaced



9 Rinse hands with water



5 Rub palm to palm with fingers interlaced



10 Dry thoroughly

When your hands are visibly clean apply the cleansing gel / hand rub in the same way you wash your hands. There's no need to rinse, the gel will evaporate after 15 seconds.