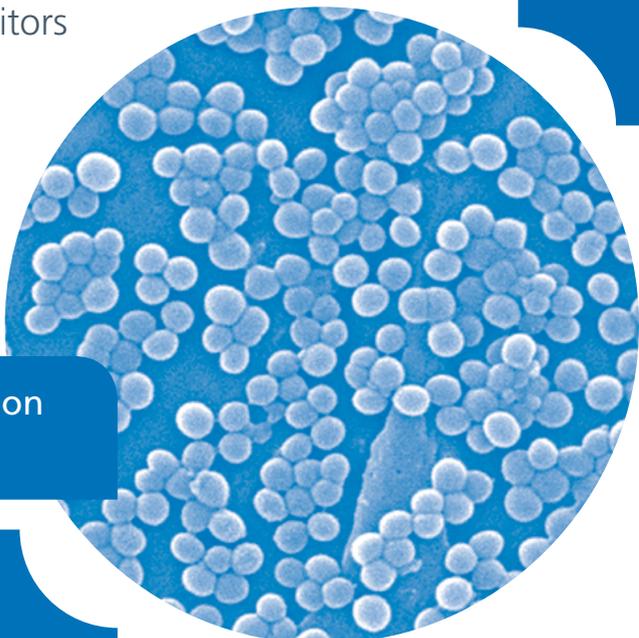


# Meticillin Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*

(MRSA)

General information for  
patients and visitors

A circular inset image showing a microscopic view of numerous spherical, light blue bacteria, likely MRSA, arranged in clusters. The bacteria are set against a darker blue background. The circular image is partially framed by blue curved shapes on the right and bottom.

Infection Prevention  
and Control

South Tees Hospitals NHS Trust takes MRSA and healthcare associated infections extremely seriously. We are committed to reducing infections in our hospitals and providing high quality health care service.

## What is MRSA?

MRSA stands for Meticillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus. It means the bacterium *Staphylococcus aureus* has become resistant to the antibiotic meticillin and some, but not all, of the most commonly used antibiotics.

## Where does MRSA live?

MRSA can be found anywhere on the human body such as on the skin, in the nose and sometimes in wounds. It can live for short periods in dust.

## What problems can it cause?

Most patients identified as having MRSA carry the bacterium harmlessly on their body. When this happens the patient is said to be colonised with MRSA. In these cases, MRSA can cause problems such as boils, abscesses and wound infections. On rare occasions, MRSA can cause more serious infections such as blood poisoning.

## Why do we need to screen for MRSA?

Most people with MRSA do not show any symptoms. We need to know if someone is carrying MRSA on their skin so that treatment can be given to reduce the risk of complications to them and other patients whilst they are recovering from their illness.

## How will I know if I have MRSA?

Patients with MRSA do not look or feel different from other patients. MRSA can only be identified from specimens sent to the hospital laboratories. Patients may have been carrying MRSA on their skin or in a wound before coming into hospital or may have acquired it in hospital. MRSA is almost always spread by physical contact and not usually through the air.

## What tests are done?

Swabs will be taken in line with Department of Health policy.

These include:

- Most planned admissions (this may be in Pre-Assessment Clinic, Outpatient Department or at a GP surgery).
- Patients known to have had MRSA in the past and admitted into hospital.
- Patients transferred from another hospital.
- Patients admitted as an emergency.

We will take a swab from inside your nostrils, your groin and any open wounds. The test is painless and only takes a minute. The swabs are then sent to the laboratory for testing. It takes a couple of days to get the results back.

## Is MRSA treatable?

Yes, despite popular belief, most MRSA colonisations and infections are successfully treated. Some people with MRSA may not need antibiotics if the bacterium is not causing any harm. However if antibiotics are needed then it will be in either tablet form or given through a drip in the arm.

Most patients with MRSA in hospital will receive treatment to try to remove MRSA from the skin. This treatment will consist of nasal cream and anti-bacterial hair and body wash. This is called decolonisation treatment.

## What happens next?

If you are told you are MRSA positive during a hospital stay you will usually be placed in a single room to help reduce the risk of other patients acquiring MRSA. Upon entering the room staff will wear gloves and an apron. Prior to leaving the room the gloves and apron will be removed and the staff will wash their hands. You will also receive decolonisation consisting of the body wash and nasal ointment. Once you have had three negative screens at weekly intervals you may be removed from the single room.

## Using the decolonisation treatment

Using the decolonisation treatment is simple. You should wash in the body wash for five days, also washing your hair twice in that time with the body wash. As long as you have had the required contact time of the product (three minutes) you can use your own products after that if you wish. You will have some cream to put up your nostrils three times a day for the five days also. If possible you should change and launder your clothing and bed linen on a daily basis (or as regularly as possible) for the duration of the treatment. This treatment should take place in the five days immediately before your operation.

If you have screened positive for MRSA and have come back into hospital please tell a member of staff you have previously screened positive for MRSA.

## How do we prevent the spread of MRSA?

Keeping hospital areas clean and dust-free is important but the easiest way to preventing MRSA spreading is with careful hand hygiene by patients and especially staff. Visitors and all staff should wash their hands thoroughly with soap and water or alcohol gel before touching patients. It is your right as a patient to ask staff if they have cleaned their hands before they touch you.

Patients with MRSA are requested to stay in their rooms until they have had three negative screens. However, physiotherapy may be an essential part of the recovery process which involves coming out of the room for walking or stairs practice.

There may be times when this may not be possible, for example, if you have MRSA in your sputum, this will be discussed with the Infection Prevention & Control team should the occasion arise.

If you wish to go to public areas such as the coffee shop, please discuss this with a member of staff first.

## Why is MRSA a risk in hospital?

Some patients are more vulnerable to picking up MRSA because of their illness or underlying medical condition or if they have a surgical wound or damaged skin. MRSA does not usually cause problems to fit, healthy people, including children and pregnant women.

## Do patients with MRSA have to stay longer in hospital?

If you have an infection caused by MRSA then you may need extra time in hospital to get better.

Some individuals may carry MRSA for long periods of time but many become clear after the decolonisation treatment and when they become medically well. You can often go home as soon as your general medical condition allows. Whether you continue with decolonisation treatment at home depends on why you were in hospital and whether you are likely to come back in at a later date.

## Does MRSA affect family, friends and other visitors?

MRSA is unlikely to affect family or friends, however they should always wash their hands before entering and leaving the hospital room of someone with MRSA. They do not need to wear aprons and gloves unless they are involved in direct patient care.

When someone with MRSA goes home they and their family should carry on as they were before coming into hospital. Good standards of personal hygiene are always important.

## Where can I get further information?

The staff looking after you or the person you're visiting should be able to answer your questions. If they cannot please ask them to contact the Infection Prevention and Control Team who will be more than happy to come and talk to you.

You can contact the Infection Prevention and Control Team on the following numbers:

The James Cook University Hospital – Tel: 01642 854800.

The Friarage Hospital, Northallerton – Tel: 01609 762033

You can get more information on MRSA at [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england) or by telephoning NHS Choices on 111.

## Comments, compliments, concerns or complaints

South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust is concerned about the quality of care you receive and strives to maintain high standards of health care.

However we do appreciate that there may be an occasion where you, or your family, feel dissatisfied with the standard of service you receive. Please do not hesitate to tell us about your concerns as this helps us to learn from your experience and to improve services for future patients.

## Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

This service aims to advise and support patients, families and carers and help sort out problems quickly on your behalf.

This service is available at The James Cook University Hospital and the Friarage Hospital Northallerton, please ask a member of staff for further information.

If you require this information in a different format please contact Freephone 0800 0282451

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