



MRSA and other health care associated infections

Information for visitors

If you are visiting a member of the family or a friend either in hospital or another place of care such as a nursing home, there are a number of things you can do to help prevent the spread of any infection, including MRSA. Remember, hospitals, health care facilities and care homes have many vulnerable patients inside.

Please treat health care facilities with respect.

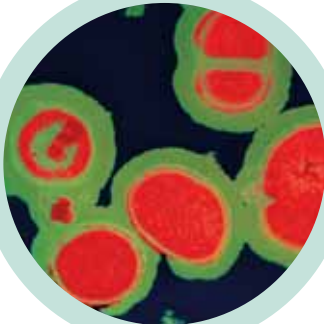


What is MRSA?

MRSA has recently received a lot of attention and the media often refer to it as the '*hospital superbug*'. MRSA stands for **M**ethicillin-**R**esistant **S**taphylococcus **A**ureus. MRSA is part of the *Staphylococcus aureus* (SA) bacteria family.

Staphylococcus aureus (SA) is a type of bacteria (germ) that can live harmlessly on human skin, but can sometimes cause a number of common infections. It is found in the nose of 20-40% of normal healthy people and in skin creases. It does not cause a problem unless it gets into a skin break during surgery or when you accidentally cut yourself, when it can cause a simple infection, such as a boil, or enter your blood stream. If it enters pores, it can also cause boils or an infection. It is sensitive to, and will be killed by, most commonly used antibiotics.

However, MRSA is a particular type of SA which has developed resistance to most antibiotics. It can live harmlessly on the skin and in some chronic wounds such as leg ulcers, but can cause problems if it does get into a skin break such as a surgical wound or a normally sterile body cavity, such as your bladder. MRSA is difficult to treat because there are only a few antibiotics that will kill it.



How can you get MRSA?

It is a myth to think of MRSA just as a 'hospital superbug'. It can be caught and passed on **almost anywhere**. MRSA can be passed from person to person by contact between them. Someone carrying the germ on their hands or skin can pass it on to another person if good basic hygiene is not carried out. It can also be found in the environment or on equipment used by people carrying the germ if cleanliness standards are not maintained. People can carry MRSA without knowing it.



Is MRSA dangerous?

MRSA usually affects elderly people and those with certain long-term health problems and generally does not harm healthy people, including pregnant women, children and babies. It is important to remember that MRSA is found not just in hospitals or care homes. People living in the community can also carry the germ. If your friend or relative has an infection that needs treating their doctor will decide the best, most appropriate treatment.

In rare cases MRSA can be fatal. In such cases the person probably acquired MRSA when they were already very ill, their immune system was low and their body was unable to cope with this additional problem.



What you can do as a visitor

If you are visiting a member of the family or a friend either in hospital or another place of care such as a nursing home, there are a number of things you can do to help prevent the spread of any infection, including MRSA. Remember, hospitals, health care facilities and care homes have many vulnerable patients inside – your behaviour can affect their outcome.

1

Strictly adhere to visiting times and to the numbers of visitors allowed.

2

Wash and dry your hands before entering and upon leaving the ward or place of care.

3

Wear clean clothes and then change or wash them when you get home.

4

Do not sit on the bed or use the patients' toilets.

5

Do not visit if you are feeling unwell or have an infection such as flu, heavy cold or diarrhoea and vomiting. If you are unsure telephone and check with the person in charge before you visit.

6

Limit the amount of presents, food items and books which can cause clutter and make cleaning bed spaces difficult.

7

Check what kind of gifts or food it is OK to bring in. Some wards, for example ICU, won't allow flowers and some may prefer you not to bring in food.

8

Talk to the nurse in charge or ask to see the matron/ senior nurse/clinical leader if you have concerns about the cleanliness of the environment.

9

Politely challenge any behaviour by staff if you feel it is not safe and ask for an explanation (there maybe very good reasons why they are doing what they are doing, but on the other hand you may have good reason to question them).

10

Do not touch your relative's/friend's wound or any other devices such as drips or catheters.

11

If you are worried or unsure about any infection control issues ask your relative's/friend's nurse to explain or ask to speak to a member of the infection control team.

More information

If you would like to know more about MRSA visit the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) website www.rcn.org.uk/mrsa



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