

# MRSA – what does it mean?

Information for patients, relatives  
and carers

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## Introduction

We take infection prevention and control very seriously. All staff receive regular training on infection prevention and control and should be able to answer any questions or concerns you may have.

Many hospital infections can be avoided, but to control hospital infections effectively, we need the support and cooperation of patients and visitors as well as staff.

The Trust has a strategy in place to prevent healthcare-associated infections such as MRSA to ensure the highest standard of hand hygiene and clinical practice. All our patients are screened for MRSA either before they are admitted to one of our hospitals or on the day of admission.

## What is MRSA?

Staphylococcus aureus is a bug found on the skin and in the nose. About 1 in 3 people carry it without any problems. Occasionally, this bacterium may enter the body and cause minor infections, such as spots and boils, or more serious complications, such as a blood infection (septicaemia), infection of the skin or underlying tissues (cellulitis) or pneumonia.

Meticillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) is the term used to describe Staphylococcus aureus that is resistant to methicillin, a penicillin antibiotic and other antibiotics which may be used to treat Staphylococcus aureus infections.

MRSA was first identified in the 1960s and was generally only seen on hospital wards caring for very sick patients, such as intensive care units.

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Since then, however, it has become much more common world-wide and now also affects people in the wider community outside hospitals.

## I've been told I carry MRSA - what does this mean?

Please don't worry. Many people carry MRSA on their skin or in their nose. It does not make them ill and they are not a risk to healthy people, including the elderly, pregnant women, children and babies. We all carry lots of different types of bacteria and they usually do not cause any problems.

This only becomes a problem when you have a procedure such as surgery when this can enter the normally sterile part of the body.

It is not always possible to get rid of MRSA. However, we can help reduce numbers of MRSA on your body with a simple treatment that reduces the chance of passing MRSA to others in hospital.

## What is the treatment to get rid of MRSA on my skin?

**If you are not currently in hospital**, the hospital or your GP may contact you and tell you what you need to do next. They will tell you all you need to know about any treatment and how to get it. Your planned operation or procedure may be delayed depending on treatment. It is important that, even if we cannot completely get rid of MRSA from your skin, the amount present is at the lowest level possible when the operation is performed.

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**If you are currently in hospital**, your doctor or nurse will discuss the treatment with you. If appropriate, we will try to get rid of the MRSA from your skin with a five-day suppression therapy of solutions and creams applied to your skin and nose. We may ask you to change your clothes, sheets and pillowcases every day.

## Are there any side effects of the treatment?

The treatment has few side effects, and they are usually mild, such as skin irritation. However, if you develop a rash, stop the treatment and ask your clinic or doctor for advice.

## What is an MRSA infection?

In most cases, SA and MRSA cause no problems if they remain on the skin. But when they get inside the body, for example into blood, wounds or urine, they may cause infections. The infections can be mild, causing redness and swelling at a wound site, or more serious, affecting the chest or blood.

If you have an infection caused by MRSA, we may use specific intravenous antibiotics (antibiotics given directly into a vein) to treat it.

## Can I still have visitors?

Yes, you can still have visitors including children and pregnant women. They are not at risk from you because MRSA does not normally affect healthy people. However, visitors should not visit other people on the ward or in the hospital to help stop the spread of infection. Always check the rules on visiting with your nurse.

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It is important that your visitors always wash their hands and use the alcohol hand gel when in hospital. They must do this when they enter and leave your room.

## What will happen after I leave hospital?

Once you are at home, you can carry on as normal. We will tell your GP that you have been treated for MRSA. He/she will discuss with you any necessary follow-up and may take further swabs to ensure that the MRSA has been fully removed.

## Further information

Please speak to your doctor or nurse in the first instance if you have any questions or concerns about MRSA or other aspects of your treatment.

For general infection prevention and control information, please contact the infection prevention and control team on 020 331 33271.

## How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (PALS) on 020 3312 7777 (10.00 – 16.00, Monday to Friday). You can also email **PALS** at [imperial.pals@nhs.net](mailto:imperial.pals@nhs.net). The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:

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Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street, London W2 1NY

Email: [ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net](mailto:ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net)

Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

## Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team: [imperial.communications@nhs.net](mailto:imperial.communications@nhs.net)

## Wi-fi

Wi-fi is available at our Trust. For more information visit our website: [www.imperial.nhs.uk](http://www.imperial.nhs.uk)

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