

Patient Information on MRSA (Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus aureus)

Infection Prevention Team

MRSA stands for Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus, which is a micro-organism or bug sometimes found on different parts of the body. MRSA can be found and passed on by contact and objects almost anywhere. It is incorrect to think that MRSA is only found in hospitals.

You may have read about MRSA in the newspapers or seen something on the television. You may even have discussed it in the past with your family or friends.

Where does MRSA come from?

Approximately 40% of us carry Staphylococcus aureus (SA) on our skin or nose without being aware of it. Usually its presence is harmless. However sometimes following an injury or an operation it can cause an infection.

MRSA is a type of Staphylococcus aureus (SA) that is resistant to the more commonly used antibiotics. It can cause infections that are more difficult to treat.

MRSA can be found on people's bodies and they will not be aware of it for example in the nose, armpits, throat or groin. This is known as an MRSA colonisation. In other words the MRSA may be found on the body but is not causing an infection.

MRSA can also be found in areas of the body such as a wound, sputum (spit), urine, or an area such as a drip site. The MRSA may or may not cause an infection. If MRSA is found in such an area of the body, the doctors and nurses looking after the individual patient will assess what treatment is needed.

There are nurses in the hospital who specialise in infections. Please ask a member of staff to contact the Infection Prevention Nurses if you require any further advice.

Why do we need to screen for MRSA?

As already mentioned, some people carry MRSA on their skin, nose or throat without being aware of it or causing them any harm.

As MRSA can be passed on by contact or even by touching an object, it is important to screen to be aware of who has MRSA so the risk of cross infection to others can be reduced. In hospital, there are many individuals who are more prone to infection than others. Also, the individual who has the MRSA can be assessed to see if they would benefit from treatment.

How do you know if you have MRSA?

The only way a person will know if they have MRSA is if a sample e.g. urine, wound swab or sputum (spit) is sent to the laboratory to be tested.

MRSA may also be found following an MRSA Full Body Screen.

What does an MRSA full body screen mean?

An MRSA screen is a quick and painless procedure. Swabs required will be explained to you prior to being taken by the healthcare worker. A member of the nursing staff will normally perform this procedure for you and it will only take a few minutes.

The swabs are sent to the Laboratory to be processed, and results will take between 48-72hrs before they are known.

Does every patient who comes into hospital or is waiting for an admission have a full body screen taken for MRSA?

No. The hospital has an MRSA Policy; therefore the staff looking after you will know if you need to have an MRSA screen or not. For example some patients waiting for a surgical procedure i.e. an Orthopaedic operation will have an MRSA screen performed. If you are waiting to come into hospital, please ask the staff if you will be having a MRSA Screen.

Patients who are admitted to certain areas of the hospital such as Intensive care, High dependency unit or a Haematology ward will automatically have an MRSA Screen.

There are a few other patients who would automatically be screened for MRSA. These are:

- patients from a Nursing or Residential Home
- a patient who has been transferred from another hospital
- a person who has received in patient treatment within the last year.

If you were expecting to have an MRSA screen, but have not yet had one performed, please check with the nurse looking after you. If you do not understand anything about the screen, please ask them to explain.

Why doesn't everyone have an MRSA screen?

The MRSA Policy for the hospital follows national guidelines that recommend a screening protocol for the healthcare settings.

In Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (ABUHB) we have many hospitals. There are acute hospitals that have many different specialities within them, e.g. Surgical, Medical and Haematology wards. There are also areas such as Intensive Care and High Dependency.

There are also Community hospitals that specialise in the rehabilitation of patients, for example a patient who had an operation in one of the acute hospitals may have been transferred to a community hospital until they are able to be discharged.

Each of the different areas within the Health Board are categorised into high, medium, low and minimal risk areas according to their speciality.

If you require further advice about MRSA screening, please ask a nurse to contact the Infection Control Team.

What happens if I have an MRSA screen and it is positive?

If the Screen has been performed in a Pre-Assessment clinic and you are waiting to come into hospital for a procedure the Consultant or Specialist nurse looking after your care will be informed of the positive result.

The Consultant looking after your care will decide what action is to be taken.

The Consultant may decide to treat the MRSA first and your admission to hospital may be delayed until negative MRSA screens are obtained.

If the admission to hospital is urgent and depending on what surgical procedure is to be carried out, surgery may go ahead as planned with antibiotic cover. However, it must be appreciated that the Consultant looking after your care will decide this on an individual basis.

How will the MRSA be treated?

The nursing staff looking after your care will be informed of the result and will inform the doctors. The doctors will decide if any treatment is required. For example, MRSA found in the nose can be treated with nasal ointment, MRSA on the skin can be treated with body washes and there are various mouthwashes available for MRSA in the throat.

The above treatment is usually given for five days. 2 days after the course of treatment has been completed a repeat MRSA Screen is performed.

If the MRSA is found for example in a wound site or urine the doctors looking after your care will decide what treatment is required. If Antibiotics are required they may be in the form of tablets (orally) or they may be prescribed in the form of a drip (Intravenously). The frequency and length of treatment will depend on the individual patient.

How will I know if the MRSA has gone?

An MRSA Full Body Screen needs to be taken 2 days after completion of treatment. If this screen is negative 2 further screens need to be performed. Each screen should be done one week apart.

MRSA can come back without the individual being aware. It is very important that if you have ever had MRSA in the past and are admitted to a hospital or any other healthcare setting, that you inform the staff. It is important to prevent the spread of MRSA in hospital so people who have had MRSA in the past will have an MRSA Screen performed and may be put in a room of their own.

If I am MRSA positive will it affect my stay in hospital?

If you are in hospital and are medically fit, MRSA will not delay your discharge home.

If you need to stay in hospital you may be moved to a single room. This is because MRSA can be passed on by contact and it is important to prevent MRSA spreading to other patients.

Nursing staff and other staff who care for patients with MRSA will be asked to wear gloves and plastic aprons. They will remove them and wash their hands when they have finished. This is done to prevent the spread of infection.

What if I do not understand the results of my MRSA screen?

The Doctors and Nursing Staff should be able to answer any questions, fears and concerns you may have. There are Infection Prevention Nurses employed by ABUHB that can come and speak to you and your family if requested. If you feel you would like to see an Infection Prevention Nurse please ask a member of staff to arrange a visit.

What happens if I have an MRSA screen performed whilst in hospital and I am discharged before the results are known?

If the result is positive the result will be phoned through to the secretary of the Consultant who was in charge of your care whilst you were in hospital. Your GP should be informed of the result on the discharge notification.

If you are concerned that you have not heard about the result, please speak to the Consultant's Secretary who was looking after your care whilst in hospital for further advice. Alternatively your GP may be able to advise you on the result.

Are my friends and family at risk from MRSA?

Healthy people are not normally at risk from MRSA. If you are concerned about an individual member of your family or friend visiting please discuss your concerns with the doctors or nursing staff looking after you.

What can I do to help?

There are alcohol foam dispensers on most of the wards and departments for staff and visitors to clean their hands when they enter and leave the area. Visitors should ask a member of staff if they need advice on using this product

All visitors should wash and dry their hands or use alcohol hand foam before they come into see you and when they leave. If they have any cuts or lesions on their hands they should ensure they are covered with a waterproof dressing.

It is not normally necessary for visitors to wear gloves or aprons; however hands must be washed and dried after any type of close contact.

If your visitors take your washing home to be laundered they should ensure that any cuts/abrasions they may have on their hands are covered with a waterproof dressing, before putting the items into the machine. The ward staff will place dirty linen in an alginate bag that can be placed directly into a domestic washing machine at home. When the washing cycle has finished you can remove the bag and place in the normal waste bin.

Clothes should be washed separately on the hottest temperature the fabric will tolerate without causing damage. A tumble dryer would be the best method for drying the clothes. Alternatively, the laundry can be dried using an outside washing line.

When dry, the laundry should be ironed on the hottest setting possible without causing damage to the clothes.

Hands should be washed and dried after contact with the laundry.

It is advisable to follow the following hygiene measures:

- Washing hands making sure they are completely dry.
- If you have a wound or a urinary catheter, you should always wash your hands and dry them before and after contact.
- Keep a bath towel and flannel for personal use, and change it frequently.
- Clothing and bed linen should be changed regularly.
- Washing should be washed separately on the hottest wash cycle that is suitable for the fabric being laundered.

Frequently asked questions

When I go home what will happen?

When you go home you should lead a normal life, doing everything you usually did - visiting friends and family, going out, socialising before you became aware about the MRSA.

If you have been sent home with any treatment for the MRSA you must complete the prescribed course.

Your GP should be sent a discharge notification from the Doctors who provided your care whilst you were in hospital which will explain what treatment you received when under their care. You can of course contact the GP to inform them of the MRSA result.

If you have any Healthcare staff visiting you at home to provide care they will be expected to wash their hands, or use an alcohol based hand rub, before putting on their gloves and apron and on removal of these items.

How did I get MRSA?

As already mentioned there are many people who are not aware they may have MRSA. It is not visible to the naked eye and can be passed on by contact with objects. Therefore it is important that everyone washes and thoroughly dries their hands frequently.

If you have any further concerns regarding MRSA which you feel have not been highlighted in this leaflet, please ask a member of staff to contact the Infection Prevention Team.

If you have a relative in hospital then an appointment can be arranged for the Infection Prevention Nurse to visit you. If you wish to speak to the Doctor's looking after your relative, please ask a member of staff to arrange a visit.

If you are at home please contact your GP for further advice.

Useful Phone Numbers

Infection Prevention Nurses
Royal Gwent Hospital
Tel. No:- 01633 - 238101 or 01633 - 234921.

Infection Prevention Nurses
Nevill Hall Hospital
Tel. No:- 01873 732048 or 01873 732613.

If the infection prevention nurses are out of the office, an answer phone facility is available if you wish to leave a message they will return your call.

Infection Prevention Nurse - Community Hospitals / Learning Disabilities and Mental Health have - mobile phone numbers:-

Tel. No:- 07903 - 324603