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# Methicillin- Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA)

Infection prevention  
and control

Patient Information





## What is Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA)?

MRSA stands for methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus.

Staphylococcus aureus is a common bacteria which a third of the population carry on their skin and in their nose. When this bacteria becomes resistant (no longer responds) to a group of antibiotics including types of penicillin, it becomes known as MRSA.

## I have MRSA. Does this mean I have an infection?

Most of the time people carry MRSA on their skin or in their nose without knowing it and without the bacteria causing any harm. This is known as being 'colonised' with the bacteria. Most people who carry MRSA in this way do not go on to develop an infection.

An MRSA infection can occur when the bacteria get into your body tissues or bloodstream. MRSA can get in through a break in the skin, such as a wound or line site, or by travelling up a tube into the bladder (a catheter).

You have an increased risk of acquiring an MRSA infection if you:


- are in hospital for long periods
- have had surgery
- are seriously ill in intensive care.

## How do you look for MRSA?

There are many occasions that you might get tested (screened) for MRSA. This can be on admission to hospital and monthly during your stay, before surgery and before you have a central line inserted.

MRSA screens will consist of a series of swabs taken from your:

- nose and groin
- any wounds or skin lesions
- line insertion sites (eg PICC lines or central lines).



The results are usually available within a few days. If the results are positive for MRSA, your clinical team will prescribe treatment to reduce the amount of MRSA you may carry on your skin. Treating MRSA reduces the chance of MRSA causing an infection or passing MRSA on to another patient.

## How does MRSA spread?

Because staphylococcus aureus bacteria live on the skin they are easily spread by direct contact, often from people's hands.

MRSA is also spread on bedding, towels, clothing and equipment. This is why strict hygiene measures in hospital are so important.

Hand hygiene is important to reduce the spread of MRSA. We advise that you:

- always wash your hands with soap and water after using the toilet and before and after eating; ask for help if you need assistance
- apply alcohol hand rub (hand sanitiser) or use hand wipes regularly to keep your hands clean.

If you are MRSA positive, you may be nursed in an isolation room and/or find that staff wear a plastic apron and gloves when providing care. This is to minimise the risk of spreading MRSA to other patients.

## How can you prevent getting MRSA?

If you are in hospital and are worried about getting MRSA, there are some measures you can take yourself.

- do not share personal items with other patients
- avoid touching drips (intravenous devices), wounds or catheters
- whilst regular cleaning will be in place, if you would like further cleaning, feel free to ask for your bedside/bathroom area to be cleaned – do not attempt to do this yourself

- clean your hands regularly (before food, after using the bathroom, etc)
- feel free to ask staff if they have washed their hands before they touch you
- feel free to ask staff to clean the equipment they are going to use
- ask your visitors to wash their hands before they come onto the ward and when they leave
- ask your visitors not to sit on your bed.

## What is the treatment for MRSA?

The products normally used for topical treatments are:

- nose – Mupirocin 2% cream which is an antibiotic
- body – Chlorhexidine gluconate 4% (which is an antiseptic wash); you may also receive an alternative skin wash called Octenisan Body Wash which can be used in the exact same way instead.

Ideally bed linen, clothing and night wear should be changed daily, washed at 40°C (warm cycle) and tumble dried and ironed when dry.

## Will being MRSA positive delay my discharge?

If you are otherwise well enough, your discharge date will not be delayed even if you are carrying MRSA on your body. MRSA is not a danger to healthy family, friends or the general public so there are no special precautions. Hand washing and general environmental cleanliness is all that is required.



## Contact details

If you would like more information, or if you have any questions/concerns about MRSA, please speak to your doctor or nurse. Alternatively, you can ask to speak to a member of the Infection Prevention and Control team on **020 8661 3917**.

### **The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline: 020 8915 6899**

You can ring the hotline 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Call us straight away if you are feeling unwell or are worried about the side effects of cancer treatments.

This service provides specialist advice and support to all Royal Marsden patients, as well as to their carers, and both hospital and community-based doctors and nurses caring for Royal Marsden patients.

For further information, please visit The Royal Marsden website: [www.royalmarsden.nhs.uk/your-care/support-services/royal-marsden-macmillan-hotline](http://www.royalmarsden.nhs.uk/your-care/support-services/royal-marsden-macmillan-hotline)

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This booklet is evidence based wherever the appropriate evidence is available, and represents an accumulation of expert opinion and professional interpretation.

Details of the references used in writing this booklet are available on request from:

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Should you require information in an alternative format, please contact The Royal Marsden Help Centre.

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