Frequently asked questions about Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA)

This leaflet is designed for inpatients and their relatives. It is about MRSA and answers some common questions.

**What is MRSA?**

MRSA stands for methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus.

Staphylococcus aureus (S. aureus) is a common germ/bug (bacteria), that 3 in 10 of us carry naturally. There are other types of bacteria in the Staphylococcus family, and we all carry at least one of the types on our skin at times, or throughout our lives. Staphylococci, as a group, are the most common cause of wound and skin infections. Some people carry *S. aureus* in their noses and on their skin. This is normal and does not require treatment. However some patients in hospital, who have MRSA on their skin, do sometimes require treatment.

MRSA is a particular type of S. aureus that has developed resistance to methicillin, a type of penicillin, as well as many other types of antibiotics. 'Resistance' means that it is not killed by the antibiotic.
Similar infections occur whether a type of *S. aureus* is resistant to antibiotics or not. Most of the time MRSA just sits on the skin without causing a problem but if it enters the body through an open wound for example it may cause an infection.

The following make patients vulnerable to any infections:

- their underlying condition
- the number of operations they’ve had
- the presence of open wounds
- how frequently they’ve used antibiotics

Is MRSA a superbug?

MRSA is sometimes referred to in the media as a superbug. However, a full explanation of MRSA is rarely given and the consequences are often exaggerated. Many people who carry MRSA on their skin lead full and normal lives.

What is the difference between colonisation and infection with MRSA?

**MRSA colonisation** means that the bacteria is simply ‘sitting on the skin’ (in any site) but is causing no harm to the person.

In an **MRSA infection**, the bacteria are causing signs of infection, for example, fever and/or pus discharging from a wound. These patients will usually be given appropriate treatment for the infection.
Is MRSA more infectious than 'ordinary' S. aureus?

MRSA is no more infectious to humans than an antibiotic-sensitive S. aureus; it is just that the options for treatment of infections are more limited.

What are health-care associated infections?

Health-care associated infections (and hospital-acquired infections) are infections that arise as a result of a patient's treatment, which can be a stay in hospital. Some people come into hospital with infections they have got in the community.

Some patients get MRSA because of the treatments they receive for their primary illness, others acquire it in the same way as they do other infections.

Infections can be spread via the hands (touch) and from the environment. Therefore, good standards of cleanliness and hygiene from everyone are required to limit the spread of MRSA. Please see the information leaflets ‘infection control information for patients’ and ‘infection control information for visitors’.

These leaflets can be found on the Addenbrooke’s website via the following links or through the patient information team on 01223 216032:

http://www.cuh.org.uk/addenbrookes/patients/patient_information/department/infection_control.html
Who has responsibility for MRSA at Addenbrooke’s Hospital?

The chief executive of the Trust has overall responsibility for MRSA in Addenbrooke’s Hospital. The infection control team takes care of the day-to-day issues.

What is the role of infection control and infection control nurses?

When you are identified as having MRSA, your medical team will discuss this with you and you will usually be visited by an infection control nurse. They can answer any questions and provide further information about your MRSA. This written information includes how to contact the infection control nurses if you have any further questions. With your permission, they are also happy to speak to your relatives about your MRSA.

Is MRSA widespread in UK hospitals?

MRSA is widespread in most hospitals in the UK. At Addenbrooke’s, we have policies to advise staff on screening and how to manage the treatment of any patients found to be MRSA positive. There are many infection control policies in place in the Trust including ones concerning hand hygiene. The MRSA policies at Addenbrooke’s are based on guidance from the National Working Group on MRSA.

Are staff screened for MRSA?

It is rarely necessary to screen staff for MRSA. The infection control team will decide when and which staff are screened.
What is being done to stop the MRSA problem?

The overuse of antibiotics worldwide has led to the emergence of many antibiotic-resistant bacteria, one of which is MRSA. The Department of Health has produced guidance to GPs and the public to discourage the use of antibiotics, unless they are clinically needed.

Hospitals are also addressing this issue by adhering to local antibiotic policies and following national guidance.

We all are monitoring cleaning standards in hospitals, surgeries and other care facilities closely to ensure they are up to standard. We are also encouraging everyone to work together to decrease the risks of catching all types of infection, not just MRSA. The simplest way to do this is to wash your hands frequently and follow good hygiene precautions.

What are antibiotics and how do they work?

Antibiotics treat infections by killing the bacteria that can cause them. Not all infections are caused by bacteria, for example antibiotics do not work against the virus infections that cause the common cold. We should not abuse the 'gift' of antibiotics by using them unnecessarily - overuse leads to antibiotic-resistance because the bacteria 'learn' to survive treatment with them.
Further Information:

For further information about MRSA contact:

- your general practitioner (GP)
- the infection control nurses, telephone: 01223 217497 (or hospital extension 217497)
- the NHS 111 service (free of charge)

We are a smoke-free site: smoking will not be allowed anywhere on the hospital site.

For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS stop smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169.

Other formats:

If you would like this information in another language, large print or audio, please ask the department where you are being treated, to contact the patient information team:

patient.info@addenbrookes.nhs.uk.

Please note: We do not currently hold many leaflets in other languages; written translation requests are funded and agreed by the department who has authored the leaflet.

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Authors: Infection Control Team
Pharmacist: Reem Santos
Department: Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 0QQ www.cuh.org.uk

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