

therefore some people infected with MRSA will need to be treated in hospital. However, some people can be treated with special antibiotic tablets at home if they are well enough.

How is the spread of MRSA prevented?

Correct and thorough hand-washing and drying are the most important ways to stop the spread of MRSA. It is particularly important that patients, carers and healthcare workers wash and dry their hands thoroughly between contacts with each other.

Always wash hands:

- After using the toilet
- Before and after eating/preparing food
- After handling soiled linen/bedding/ nappies
- After touching animals
- When hands appear dirty.

No special cleaning methods are required though good general cleanliness is important in helping prevent the spread of infection generally.

Should I stay away from work/school or playgroups?

People with MRSA colonisation can live their normal lives at work and home.

If you have MRSA infection you may need to be treated in hospital. In some circumstances if you feel well enough and don't work with vulnerable people, you can work, but you will need to remember to take all your prescribed treatment.

For further information about MRSA and how it might affect you, your family and friends please contact:

Public Health on 642645

Implementation date: Dec 2010

Review date: Dec 2011 - Edition: Three

The information in this document can be provided in large print or on audio tape on request.



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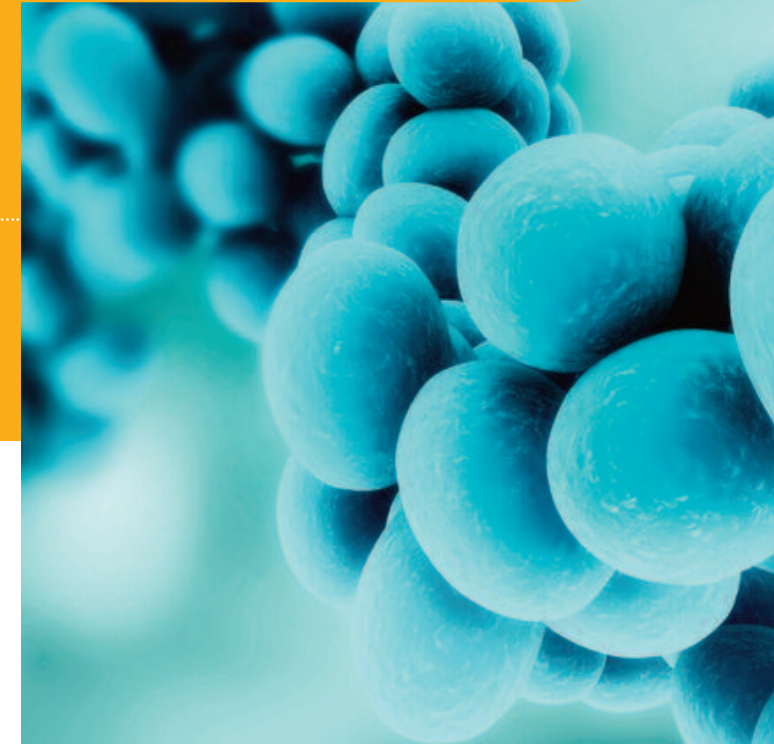
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Public Health Ref No. CDC8c 12/10

What is MRSA?



Health Protection



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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What is MRSA?

Meticillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) is a type of bacteria (germ) found mainly in the nose and on the skin of many healthy people. It is normally harmless and you don't know you have it, but it can sometimes lead to infection causing boils, abscesses and wound infections. Such infections can usually be easily treated with antibiotics.

However, some *Staphylococcus aureus* germs are resistant to meticillin (penicillin family) which is a type of antibiotic; this is **Meticillin Resistant-*Staphylococcus aureus*** or **MRSA**. Many commonly prescribed antibiotics are not effective against these germs.

MRSA, me and you

MRSA and healthy people can live very happily together without causing any health problems. As with *Staphylococcus aureus* described above, some people have the germ present but it's not causing them any harm or infection. This is known as being **COLONISED** (or like being a carrier) and you probably won't know you have it unless you are checked for it. In some cases MRSA colonisation clears up in time by the body using its own natural defences.

So what is MRSA infection?

MRSA can be naturally colonised on the body and may enter the body causing wound, skin and urine infections. MRSA may also be responsible for pneumonia and blood poisoning.

Occasionally, vulnerable people develop MRSA infection, e.g. people who are ill or need surgery.

People with the infection will develop signs - for example, fever and pain. If MRSA infection is suspected it is checked by the laboratory so the correct treatments can be given.

Can I only catch MRSA in hospital?

It is a myth that you can only catch MRSA in hospital. MRSA exists in the community as explained above and people who are colonised may go into hospital with the germ on their skin without them knowing they have it (this applies to visitors as well as patients).

How can I tell if I have MRSA?

People who are colonised with MRSA do not look or feel any different. The only way the germ can be detected is by taking samples (e.g. a swab from the skin, nose and throat) for testing in the laboratory.

Testing for MRSA colonisation is usually only carried out as part of Noble's Hospital inpatient screening policy. It is not necessary to screen healthy individuals in the community.

Will the MRSA harm my family or friends?

MRSA is not a risk to healthy people, including pregnant women and babies. There should be no reason why a person with MRSA cannot mix with others in the community.

How is MRSA spread?

The MRSA germ is passed on from one person to another through skin contact or following direct contact with things that have been contaminated with it. It is only when it gets into the body through a wound or broken skin such as a rash, cut or sore, or through a medical drip or drain that it can cause an infection. That's why thorough hand-washing and hand-drying are so important – in helping to stop the spread!

How is MRSA treated?

If, as part of the inpatient hospital screening process a patient is found to be colonised with MRSA with no signs of infection, they may be asked to use:

- A special antibiotic ointment to apply inside the nose
- An antiseptic skin cleanser to use for their daily body wash/bath/shower and hair wash
- An antiseptic talcum powder to use after their daily wash
- An antiseptic mouthwash/ gargle
- If they have any wounds or sores they may also be given special dressings and/or ointment to apply.

If a patient becomes **INFECTED** with MRSA at home or in hospital this will need to be treated with special antibiotics.

These antibiotics may need to be given by intravenous infusion (a drip into the vein),