MRSA

basic facts
What is MRSA?
MRSA stands for Meticillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus Aureus*. The MRSA bacteria belongs to the *Staphylococcus aureus* (SA) bacteria family. SA is a common bacteria. It lives harmlessly on the skin and in the nose of around a third of healthy people. When it does cause infection ‘ordinary’ SA is sensitive to most commonly used antibiotics. MRSA is a particular type of SA that has developed resistance to several antibiotics. Only a few antibiotics will kill MRSA.

What causes MRSA?
SA and MRSA cause problems only when they get into breaks in the skin (wounds, cuts, sores) or into the bloodstream (bacteraemia), or into normally sterile body cavities (such as the bladder). Infections are more likely, and can be particularly serious, in patients whose resistance to infection is lowered by long-term or serious frailty or ill-health, injury, surgery, or drugs. MRSA infections occur more often in patients with intravenous drips or catheters and in intensive care units. In rare cases MRSA can be fatal.

MRSA does not generally harm healthy people, including pregnant women, children and babies.

How can MRSA pass from one person to another?
People may carry the MRSA bacteria without knowing it, and patients may have it before they are admitted to hospital. MRSA can be caught and passed on almost anywhere, not just in hospital. The MRSA bacteria is spread on hands and skin from person-to-person.

Staff, patients, relatives, and other visitors can help prevent the spread of MRSA by thorough, regular handwashing with soap and water and by using the alcohol hand rub found on our hospital wards and on entrances to wards.

Can visitors catch MRSA?
If visitors carry out hand hygiene before entering and leaving wards they will largely protect themselves from contracting MRSA. Even if they acquire MRSA, it will usually cause them no harm, they will probably be unaware of it, it will be temporary and won’t need to be investigated or treated. Visitors who may have a reduced resistance to infection because of their own chronic ill-health or frailty should discuss these risks with the clinical team looking after their relative.
Can MRSA be treated?
MRSA infections can usually be treated by one of a small number of antibiotics which kill it. Other medications, such as antibacterial wash and nasal ointments, are used to remove MRSA from the skin and nose of patients who are susceptible to serious MRSA infection.
Patients who have MRSA may be moved to a single room or a separate bay to assist their treatment and to help prevent cross-infection to other patients.

How do you know if you’ve got MRSA?
MRSA can cause a wide variety of symptoms and problems. Patients may be unaware that they harbour MRSA because it has caused them no problems. To identify such ‘colonised’ people many groups of patients are screened (by taking skin and nose swabs) before they come into our hospitals or during their stay. Where MRSA is found, patients may be treated in separate areas and offered antibacterial skin and hair washes and ointments to eradicate the MRSA and prevent potential problems.

What is MRSA screening?
MRSA screening is performed to identify patients who might be carrying MRSA. This is done on admission in most specialties. Screening principally involves swabbing the nose and sometimes taking swabs or other specimens from other parts of the body. Once the swabs have been taken they are sent to the microbiology laboratory at the QMC campus and the results are usually available in 24-48 hours.

What is the hospital doing to tackle MRSA?
The prevention of hospital infections is the top clinical priority for the Trust. At NUH we do everything we can to prevent MRSA infections. We are:
- ensuring staff routinely clean their hands before and after touching every patient.
- training all staff in the correct way to wash hands and to clean equipment to prevent cross-infection.
- screening patients (skin and nose swabs) before admission or operation in the majority of specialties and treating with antibacterial wash if MRSA is found.
- monitoring and improving cleanliness in all wards and departments.
- minimising the risk of cross-infection by quickly isolating patients with MRSA in a single room or in a separate bay.
Help us prevent infection

• asking some patients to wash and shower in hospital using an antibacterial wash to reduce the number of bacteria on the skin (including MRSA), and/or to use antibiotic nasal cream.
• encouraging visitors to handwash with soap and water and to use alcohol hand rub (found at all bedsides and entrances to all wards) every time they enter or leave the ward. Cleaning your hands with soap and water or alcohol hand rub reduces the risk of MRSA infections.

What can patients and visitors do to help prevent MRSA?
The key points to remember are:
• wash your hands carefully and every time with soap and water and use the alcohol hand rubs provided.
• remind staff to wash their hands when they may have forgotten – it’s OK to ask!

Clean your hands effectively to reduce the risk of infection.

If you have any questions or concerns our Infection Prevention and Control Team will be happy to provide advice or further information:
Queen’s Medical Centre campus: 0115 924 9924 ext 63866
City Hospital campus: 0115 969 1169 ext 55578

You can also visit our website: http://www.nuh.nhs.uk/cleanych yourhands/

This document is available in other languages and formats upon request from the Communications Team at Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust on
0115 924 9924 ext 63562
or by e-mail at nuhcommunications@nuh.nhs.uk

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