

MRSA & YOU

Information for Clinical Staff

MRSA is a bacteria. Viruses probably are more important in causing infection in the general population, but serious infections, and those associated with hospitals, are usually bacterial.

In the 1950's Staphylococcus aureus, a common bacteria, caused large epidemics of infections which spread through hospitals. Patients and staff were affected. The "Hospital Staphylococcus" was greatly feared because infections were often untreatable.

Over the years antibiotics have become available and the balance of success has swung in favour of treatment. However, hand-in-hand with the increasing use of antibiotics was the evolution of strains of bacteria resistant to more and more antibiotics.

Staphylococcus aureus is carried by up to 50% of the normal population, along with a whole range of organisms. Between 5% and 30% of these people carry the strain which is antibiotic resistant (MRSA). The fact that a healthy person carries the resistant strain is not a problem. It may become important, however, if that person requires an operation or other medical treatment. Similarly, it is important to prevent the spread of the bacteria from healthy people, including clinical staff, to those who are vulnerable to infection.

To control the spread of infection patients in hospitals are isolated; other patients on the ward and staff who are involved with clinical care are screened for carriage. As a member of the clinical staff your screening swabs may show that you are carrying the MRSA in your nose or your throat. As a fit, healthy individual this is not a problem for you. The MRSA must be irradiated, however, to prevent the organism infecting patients who are at risk. For example, those patients who are already fighting infections or who are immunocompromised, for a variety of reasons.

Nasal carriage treatment is usually in the form of an antibiotic nasal cream. To irradiate throat carriage treatment will depend on the organism's sensitivity and will usually be in the form of antibiotics to be taken orally.

Unfortunately, you will not be allowed to return to work until you have been taking the treatment for a minimum of twenty-four hours. **No** amounts of antibiotics are a substitute for high standards of hand hygiene. Once treatment is completed further swabs will be taken to assess the results of the treatment.

If I Am Carrying MRSA Will I Or A Member Of My Family Become Ill?

Every fit and healthy human being, child or adult, carries a variety of pathogenic organisms with no significant consequences. If you, or a member of your family, are taking medication which could potentially reduce your immunity, or are being treated with antibiotics for another infection, your doctor should be made aware of the fact that you are carrying MRSA. In addition, if you, or a member of your family, suffer from a chronic skin condition, for example psoriasis or chronic eczema, which is infected or producing fissures, cracking or other breaks in the skin, your General Practitioner or Dermatologist should be informed.

There is no simple cure for MRSA. We must work together to prevent its' spread and protect the most vulnerable.

