



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

MRSA: An information leaflet for patients and their families



HSE South
Community Infection Control Services

What is MRSA?

MRSA is a bacteria and is an abbreviation for meticillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*.

Staphylococcus aureus, often referred to as Staph aureus for short, is a bacteria that 20-30% of people carry harmlessly on their skin or in their nose without knowing it. If you are one of these people, you are not infected, you are a carrier. This is also referred to as being colonized and is a term you may hear when in hospital. MRSA is the name given to Staph aureus which is resistant to some antibiotics including Meticillin.

If Staph aureus or MRSA, enters the body through a cut or wound, it can cause infections such as boils or abscesses. MRSA does **not** cause different or more serious infections than Staph aureus., but there are fewer antibiotics available to treat an MRSA infection if it occurs.

MRSA is **not** a risk to healthy people in the community. The main risk is to hospital patients, especially those who are severely ill or are having major surgery.

Where is MRSA found?

MRSA is most commonly found on people in their nose, armpits, groin, wounds and bladder. MRSA can also survive in dust.

What is the difference between being colonised and being infected with MRSA?

When you are colonised, MRSA is present somewhere on your body without causing any harm. When you are infected, MRSA is damaging tissue.

How does a person get MRSA?

A person tends to get MRSA if they:

- have recently taken a few courses of antibiotics,
- are often admitted to hospital, or
- have been unwell and have had contact with someone who has MRSA.

How is MRSA spread?

It is usually spread by hands. If a person is caring for someone with MRSA and does not wash and dry their hands properly, the MRSA can then be passed on to the next person that they touch.

Remember for a person to develop an MRSA infection, there must be some way for it to enter the body, for example through a wound, drip or drain.

Can MRSA infection be treated?

Yes it can, but MRSA infection is more difficult to treat because we have fewer antibiotics to work against it.

How will I find out if I have MRSA?

People who have MRSA, but are not infected with it, do not look or feel different from other people. MRSA can only be identified by taking a sample, for example urine or pus from a wound, and sending it to a lab for testing. The results usually take about three days to come back from the lab.

What treatment will I get if I have MRSA?

Often MRSA goes away on its own, but if you are due to go to hospital for surgery, for example, a doctor may prescribe washing lotions, creams, nasal ointment or powders to get rid of the MRSA first.

What happens if I have MRSA in hospital?

MRSA does not mean you have to stay longer in hospital if you are otherwise ready to go home. Neither will you normally need special treatment after you are discharged. If you have started treatment for MRSA and need to finish it, the hospital will let you know.

If you are not well enough to leave hospital, you may be transferred to a single room and prescribed medication such as washing lotions, creams, ointment or powder to get rid of the MRSA. This is an important measure to prevent MRSA from spreading to other patients who may be seriously ill and unable to cope with another infection.

If I get MRSA, can I pass it to my family and friends?

In patients who are otherwise well, MRSA often disappears once you leave the hospital and antibiotics are stopped. There is little risk of transmitting MRSA to healthy people in the community, including any pregnant women, children or babies.

Do I need to tell people that I have MRSA?

You do not have to tell anyone that you have MRSA. However, if you go to your doctor or are re-admitted to hospital, you should tell your doctor that you had MRSA in the past as it may influence the type of treatment you need.

Should I take precautions when visiting hospitals or any other healthcare setting?

You can do a few simple things to prevent the spread of any infection, including one caused by MRSA.

- Do not visit a patient if you have any symptoms such as flu, diarrhoea or vomiting.
- Wash and dry your hands thoroughly before and after your visit.
- Alcohol hand rubs are available in many healthcare settings for visitors. Only use alcohol rubs, if your hands look clean and remember to continue rubbing it into your hands until they feel dry.
- Do not sit on the patient's bed, but instead sit on any chairs provided.
- Do not touch a patient's wound or any tubing or drips they may be connected to.

Can I go back to work and carry on my normal activities if I have MRSA?

You can go to work, school or college and socialise as usual and do not need to restrict contact with friends, children or older people. However, if you are a healthcare worker and have an MRSA infection, you should contact the Occupational Health Department for advice.

MRSA does not restrict you going about your usual activities including socialising, swimming and going to the gym. Regardless of whether you have MRSA or not, you should avoid swimming if you have open sores or wounds. Any wounds should be covered with a waterproof dressing if you are taking part in sports.

If my child has MRSA, can they go to school or nursery?

If your child has MRSA, they can attend nursery and go to school as normal. You do not have to tell the school or nursery.

What can I do to prevent MRSA from spreading?

Washing your hands well is the single most important measure to prevent the spread of any infection, including one caused by MRSA. Hands should be cleaned before changing any dressing on a wound or handling any drips or tubes that enter the body. Hands should also be cleaned after any of these procedures. If you have MRSA, insist that everyone who is caring for you washes and dries their hands. As MRSA also survives in dust, it is also important to maintain high standards of general cleaning using a detergent and water.

What precautions should I take at home if I have MRSA or if a family member has it?

- Keep cuts, sores and wounds covered with the appropriate dressing. Follow medical advice about the dressing and do not touch the area.
- Ask your family to wash their hands with warm water and soap before and after caring for you. This is particularly important if they care for your wound, catheter or feeding tube.
- Wash your own hands often and keep a high standard of personal hygiene.
- Wash cutlery and crockery as normal.
- Wash clothes such as night wear, underwear, bed linen and towels as normal in a hot wash with detergent.
- Do not share personal items such as toothbrushes, razors, towels and face cloths.
- Clean equipment such as commodes thoroughly with detergent and warm water after use.

Healthcare workers will not need to take any extra precautions when caring for you. They will follow the usual steps of washing their hands carefully and wearing gloves and an apron whenever they change a wound dressing, whether or not the patient has MRSA.

How to wash your hands properly

- 1 Wet your hands under running water.
- 2 Lather with soap.
- 3 Cover all parts of your hands.
- 4 Rinse well under running water.
- 5 Dry thoroughly.

IT SHOULD TAKE AROUND 30 SECONDS
TO WASH YOUR HANDS
PROPERLY



For more information, contact the Infection Control Nurse for your area.

Cork and Kerry Disability Services
(086) 787 2179

Kerry Community Services
(086) 787 1397

Cork Community Services
(087) 629 9567

St. Finbarr's Hospital
(086) 787 1393

Where care is provided by family carers, sections of the “Infection Prevention and Control – An information booklet for Home Helps and Personal Assistants” maybe useful. This booklet is available from the Infection Control Nurses in your area

You can also get more information from the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) website, www.hpsc.ie.

For frequently asked questions, guidance and levels of MRSA and other infections in Ireland, go into the Topics A–Z section of the site and then choose M from the available letters for MRSA.

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