

## Q What happens when I get home?

Family life should continue as normal. MRSA is extremely unlikely to harm healthy people outside hospital, including babies, children and pregnant women. It should not stop you shopping, going to the pub, visiting friends, etc. and living your life as normal.

- Normal domestic cleaning is adequate, surfaces and floors should be cleaned/vacuumed regularly.
- Clothing, bedding etc. can be washed as normal in the family washing machine.
- Rubbish can go into the ordinary household waste.
- District Nurses/Community Nurses may need to wear gloves and aprons when providing physical care for you e.g. dressing wounds.

If you need to be admitted to any hospital in future you should tell the staff that you are an MRSA carrier.

### FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

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**This leaflet was produced jointly by the National Spinal Injuries Centre and the Infection Control Team at Stoke Mandeville Hospital. It provides general guidance on the care of patients with MRSA. Because every patient is different individual care plans may vary.**

## FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) About MRSA



A Guide for Spinal Cord Injured Patients and Carers

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Spinal Directorate Committee  
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## **METHICILLIN RESISTANT *STAPHYLOCOCCUS AUREUS***

### **Q What is MRSA? (Methicillin Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*)**

*Staphylococcus aureus* is a bacterium commonly found in the nose and on the skin of many people and does no harm. Sometimes, It can cause skin infections such as boils and can infect cuts. MRSA is a type of *Staphylococcus aureus* that has become resistant to many antibiotics including Methicillin. Many people, both in hospital and in the community, carry MRSA on their skin.

### **Q Why is it a problem?**

Infection may be caused by many different bacteria if they have the opportunity to multiply in the body. Some people are more at risk because they already have an illness or are having an operation. Patients in hospital are more vulnerable because they might have intravenous lines, urinary catheters or open wounds e.g. after surgery. If the bacteria are resistant to antibiotics, then the infection is more difficult to treat. MRSA is no more dangerous than ordinary *Staphylococcus aureus* except it is resistant to the commonest antibiotics used to treat infection. Therefore, if someone has an infection caused by MRSA, there are a limited number of antibiotics that can be used to treat him or her.

### **Q How is it spread?**

*Staphylococcus aureus* is spread mainly by touch with the hands, therefore, regular hand hygiene by care providers is essential. This is why care providers should wear gloves and aprons while caring for patients in hospital.

### **Q Is it necessary to take swabs?**

The nursing staff may need to take swabs from patients to find out where the MRSA is. In some cases it may be necessary to repeat swabs to see if the MRSA is still present. To be declared free from MRSA you will have to have 3 consecutive negative swabs, which will take about 3 weeks to complete. Furthermore, you will have to be swabbed weekly to ensure you remain negative.

### **Q Can I use the car in the archery room?**

A car seat cover, which can be wiped, is required and should be cleaned with a damp cloth (general detergent and water or detergent wipe) afterwards. Plastic sheet covers are not required. Only one patient at a time should use this facility, with no mixing with non-MRSA patients.

### **Q Can I go on rehabilitation trips?**

Providing patients are in their own wheelchairs, MRSA positive patients may attend with MRSA negative patients. Staff and patients must maintain good hygiene practices (including hand hygiene).

## **MRSA AND MY FRIENDS AND FAMILY**

### **Q Is MRSA a risk to visitors?**

MRSA is rarely a problem for healthy people. They should keep cuts and grazes covered with a dressing or waterproof plaster and make sure they wash their hands thoroughly before leaving the ward. It is not necessary for visitors to wear gloves and aprons.

### **Q Will it delay my discharge from hospital?**

Usually there will be no delay if you are returning to your own home. However, there might be some delay if you have to be transferred to another hospital, as some specialist units may want you to be in a single room. This should not compromise your care in any way.

It should not stop you going into a nursing or residential home, where although you may have a single room, you will be able to mix freely with other residents.

**Q Can I attend the wheelchair clinic?**

Providing patients attend in their own wheelchair, there is no need for a dedicated session for MRSA positive patients. It is essential, however, that high standards of hygiene are maintained.

**Q Can I attend sports therapy sessions?**

MRSA positive and MRSA negative patients may mix for non contact sports (e.g. table tennis, archery) providing they avoid physical contact.

**Q Can I use weights?**

MRSA positive patients may use weights during physiotherapy sessions providing they are cleaned between patient uses.

**Q Can I use exercise slings?**

These should be managed like the hoist slings i.e. a sling must be allocated for individual patients whilst it is in use. Once therapy is completed, it must be cleaned or laundered prior to reuse.

**Q Can I use the hydrotherapy pool?**

Yes. There should be dedicated sessions for MRSA patients following which the changing facilities should be cleaned.

**Q Can I attend the occupational therapy department?**

MRSA positive patients may attend occupational therapy sessions at any time providing the immediate area is wiped down after use. Gloves and aprons are not required to be worn by OT staff routinely, however, meticulous hand hygiene should be followed on completion of tasks/sessions. Soft furnishings in patient areas of the occupational therapy department, which cannot be wiped, are not permitted due to the need to clean these items after use.

**Q Will I need special accommodation?**

Whilst in hospital, you will be cared for in a single room or in a bay with other MRSA patients. The nursing staff will explain what is involved. Psychological help to cope with the isolation will be available if you feel you need it.

Isolation room doors **must** remain closed for activities such as bed making, washing, wound dressings or physiotherapy. At all other times, doors may be left open **providing** high standards of environmental cleanliness are maintained (i.e. daily cleaning of isolation rooms to ensure they remain clean and dust free) and other patients do not enter.

**Q Why do some MRSA patients have different restrictions?**

There are several strains of MRSA. Mupirocin resistant or other multi-resistant strains of MRSA are a significant problem because they are more difficult to treat. If you are a carrier of one of these strains your movements in the centre will have to be restricted further to avoid spread to other patients. Your nurse and doctor will discuss these restrictions with you.

**Q Where did I get MRSA?**

You may have been admitted already carrying MRSA from the community or another hospital, or you may have contracted it during your stay at Stoke Mandeville Hospital. Our patients are equally divided among these groups. Frequently, it is not possible to know because people may be carrying the bacteria long before it is found.

**Q Is MRSA treatable?**

Although MRSA is resistant to many antibiotics there are still a number of drugs that can be used to treat it successfully. These antibiotics may, however, have to be given by injection and may have side effects. This should commonly be reserved for people who are ill with infection caused by MRSA and not if you are just a carrier. Sometimes your doctors, after discussion with you, will advise treatment to clear you. It is not guaranteed that this will always be successful. You should not at any time, during the treatment course, mix with other MRSA patients or the

treatment will fail. You have to have 3 consecutive negative swabs after the treatment and you have to be swabbed weekly thereafter.

## **WHAT CAN I DO?**

### **Q Am I free to mix with other people?**

The Infection Control Team is acutely aware of potential negative effects of isolation for the spinally injured patients. Whilst wishing to encourage the formation of social circles, we need to ensure that the risks of transmission of MRSA to other patients are minimal.

We endeavour not to restrict your movements within the Centre more than is necessary. There are however responsibilities that go with freedom. You have a responsibility not to transmit MRSA to your fellow patients.

### **The freedom to move does not mean unrestricted mixing.**

The following should answer some of the common questions.

### **Q Can I use the NSIC dining room?**

Patients may attend the NSIC dining room if accompanied by relatives or visitors. If you are to sit opposite non-MRSA patients, you should avoid any physical contact.

### **Q Can I use the day rooms?**

This is a similar situation to the dining room and the answer given above applies.

### **Q What about using the washing machine?**

Patients who are MRSA positive may launder their clothes in the ward washing machine but they must not mix their clothes with those of other patients. Whenever possible, clothes should be tumble-dried in a separate load.

### **Q Can I use the smoking shelter?**

Yes, providing no physical contact and no exchange of smoking material occur between MRSA and non-MRSA patients.

### **Q Can I visit patients on other wards?**

Unfortunately it is not possible to visit other wards to see non-MRSA patients. With the permission of the nurse in charge of your ward and the one you wish to visit it may be possible to visit other MRSA patients who are not receiving treatment or carriers of one of the multi-resistant strains of MRSA.

### **Q Can I attend the patient education sessions?**

Both MRSA and non-MRSA patients can attend the same education sessions providing every patient remains seated in his/her wheelchair and there is no physical contact between patients. Patients with Mupirocin resistant strains cannot attend the session.

### **Q Can I participate in physiotherapy sessions?**

Although from the infection control point of view MRSA patients should receive the same level of therapy as non-MRSA patients, in practice this is not achievable. Both group of patients have to attend separate dedicated sessions and the environment has to be cleaned after the session for MRSA patients prior to general use. From a practical point, and to enable staff and domestic services to decontaminate the environment and equipment, the session for MRSA patients has to be the last session of the day. Therapy staff may be able to suggest alternative times.

Equipment used for general MRSA sessions must be cleanable (wipeable). Sheepskins, pillows etc. may be used for MRSA sessions and then retained.

Patients carrying Mupirocin resistant strains of MRSA, and those under treatment for MRSA, must **not** attend MRSA therapy sessions and will be provided treatment on a one to one basis. Equipment used for patients carrying Mupirocin or other multi-resistant strains of MRSA must be dedicated for their use only.