

## Patient information

# What is MRSA? Neonatal Unit - information for parents

## What is MRSA?

MRSA stands for Meticillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*. *Staphylococcus aureus* is a bacterium that is commonly found on the skin and in the nose of healthy people, causing them no harm at all; this is called colonisation. Occasionally these bacteria can get into the body and cause an infection. Some infections may be minor, such as pimples or boils, while others may be more serious, for example blood infections or pneumonia. MRSA is a strain of the *Staph. aureus* bacteria, which has developed resistance to some antibiotics. This means that only certain antibiotics can be used to treat infections.

## Screening for MRSA

If your baby is premature its immune system will be under-developed. Your baby may also have various invasive tubes inserted for treatments, fluids, or monitoring. This means that they will be more vulnerable to infections of all kinds. For that reason we take special care to monitor your baby very closely for any signs of infection so that treatment can be started promptly if required. Part of our monitoring includes the screening of all babies on the unit for MRSA colonisation. We screen all babies on admission or transfer to the unit and then once a week for the duration of their admission.

## How do we screen for MRSA?

We screen for MRSA colonisation by taking swabs (like a cotton wool bud) from your baby's nose, groin and belly button. The swabs are then sent to the laboratory for processing and the results are usually available within a couple of days.

## **What happens if my baby has MRSA?**

If your baby has MRSA colonisation, this means that they are carrying the bacteria on their skin or in their nose. It does not mean that they have an infection. In order to reduce their risk of developing an infection, we will start them on some treatment called decolonisation. The treatment is a five day course comprising of antiseptic nasal cream and body wash. When the treatment has been completed we will re-screen your baby to see if the treatment has been successful. It is not always possible to get rid of the bacteria completely especially if your baby still has tubes in place. If we detect MRSA on the screens after treatment we may repeat the treatment once more. Antibiotics will only be prescribed if the doctors think your baby has an MRSA infection.

## **How does MRSA spread?**

Because MRSA is commonly found on the skin, it can be spread very easily on the hands. For that reason any staff caring closely for your baby will wear disposable gloves and aprons and pay special attention to cleaning their hands both before and after giving care. We may also take additional precautions such as moving your baby to a different part of the neonatal unit and setting aside equipment, specifically for your baby. This will be explained to you by one of the nurses.

## **Do parents have to take the same precautions?**

**NO:** It is not necessary for parents or carers to wear aprons and gloves when handling their baby. In fact we would encourage skin to skin contact. We would ask that you carry out hand hygiene using the alcohol gel or washing your hands on entering and exiting the unit and before and after contact with your baby. However, these are measures that apply to ALL visitors to the unit.

## **Will my baby have to stay in hospital longer?**

**NO:** There is no need to delay your baby's discharge from hospital because of MRSA colonisation.

## **Screening of parents or family members**

When a baby is identified with MRSA it is quite likely that parents will also screen positive due to the close contact that you naturally have with your baby. Please remember that MRSA colonisation is not a problem for healthy people. We will not ask for you to be screened, but if you are concerned please contact your G.P who should be able to arrange screening if you request it.

## Who can I talk to about MRSA?

The doctors and nurses on the neonatal unit will be able to talk to you about any concerns you may have regarding MRSA. If you require further information or wish to speak to a member of the Infection Prevention Team, please ask the nurses to arrange this.

*If you would like any information regarding access to the West Suffolk Hospital and its facilities please visit the hospital website [www.wsh.nhs.uk](http://www.wsh.nhs.uk) and click on the link, or visit the disabledgo website:*

*<http://www.disabledgo.com/organisations/west-suffolk-nhs-foundation-trust/main>*

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