How can I help reduce healthcare associated infections?

Infection prevention & control is important to the well-being of our patients and for that reason we have infection prevention & control procedures in place. Keeping your hands clean is an effective way of preventing the spread of infections. We ask that you, and anyone visiting you, use the hand sanitiser available at the entrance to every ward before coming into and after leaving the ward. In some situations hands may need to be washed at the sink using soap and water rather than using the hand sanitiser as hand sanitisers are not suitable for use when dealing with patients who have symptoms of diarrhoea.

For infection prevention & control purposes and to keep you safe and well visitors are requested not to:
• Visit you if they are unwell
• Sit on your bed or use the patient toilets.
• Touch your wounds, or any medical devices, drips or catheters.

How can I find out more?
Contact the Infection Prevention & Control Department on:
Wycombe Hospital Tel: 01494 425456
Stoke Mandeville Hospital Tel: 01296 315337
Public Health England Tel: 0845 279 9879
Public Health England Website: http://www.hpa.org.uk

www.buckshealthcare.nhs.uk
Follow us on Twitter @buckshealthcare

If you require a translation of this leaflet please call 01296 315337.

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What is MRSA? (Meticillin Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*)

*Staphylococcus aureus* is a very common bacterium (germ) that around 30% of the population carry on their skin or in their nose without knowing it.

Usually this bacterium is harmless. Sometimes though, it can cause skin infections such as boils. These infections are normally mild and are easily treated.

Some strains of the *Staphylococcus aureus* bacterium have developed a degree of resistance to the more commonly used antibiotics (e.g. Penicillin), and are called MRSA (Meticillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*).

It is this resistance to certain (not all) antibiotics that makes MRSA different, as it may not be as easy to treat if it does cause an infection.

People can carry MRSA in the same way as the usual *Staphylococcus aureus* without causing harm to themselves or others.

MRSA was first identified in hospitals but it is now found in the general community and in care homes.

**How will you know if you have it?**

MRSA is only detected by a laboratory. This usually happens only when a wound or another area of the body becomes infected and it is identified, e.g. by a wound swab or urine specimen.

Testing for MRSA is sometimes carried out as part of a hospital screening policy. Certain people are more vulnerable to infection e.g. people with urinary catheters and those with surgical wounds – this is why extra precautions are taken in healthcare environments such as hospitals to prevent spread of MRSA.

**How can you help prevent spread of MRSA?**

MRSA can be spread by hands, so **hand washing is the most important way to stop it spreading**. Therefore we would ask you to help us provide a safe environment by using the hand sanitiser on entering and exiting the ward/department. Also to complete good hand hygiene practice by using the hand sanitiser/wash your hands if you carry out any ‘hands on care’ with your relative.

It is particularly important that carers and healthcare workers wash and dry their hands thoroughly between caring for people.

Always wash hands:
- Between caring for clients/patients
- After using the toilet
- Before eating/preparing food
- After handling soiled linen/bedding/nappies
- After touching animals
- When hands appear dirty

Healthcare workers may use a hand sanitiser to assist in ensuring that their hands are properly clean and do not transfer MRSA between patients.

No special cleaning methods or products are required though good general cleanliness is important in helping prevent the spread of infection generally.

Clothing and bedding do not generally need to be washed separately or differently.

**Additional Information**

Hospitals have policies to minimise the spread of MRSA. If you have MRSA, it is important that you let the hospital know prior to admission. If your relative has MRSA they will be given an MRSA Patient Information Leaflet.

If you are due to come into hospital for some types of surgery, the pre-op clinic may take swabs to check whether MRSA is present. This is to reduce the risk of post-operative (after surgery) infection. If you are in hospital and medically fit, having MRSA will not delay your discharge home.

Friends and family are not at risk from MRSA, as it does not normally affect healthy people. To prevent spreading MRSA, they should wash their hands thoroughly at all times and ensure all cuts or abrasions on their hands are covered with waterproof dressings. This includes babies, children and pregnant women.

It is not necessary for visitors or carers to wear gloves if, for example, they are just talking to patients, but hands must be washed after all patient contact. In hospital you may be asked to wash your hands or use a hand sanitiser foam after assisting a patient and on entering and leaving a hospital ward.