

WHAT IS MRSA?

Staphylococcus aureus are common bacteria that we can have on our skin or in our noses. Usually we don't even know that they are there. They can sometimes cause infections, usually less serious skin infections, but in rarer cases (especially in people with impaired immunity), they can cause more serious infections. These infections, however, can be treated with antibiotics.

Some Staphylococcus aureus are not sensitive (they are resistant) to important types of antibiotics. These are called MRSA (Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus). The problem with MRSA is that infections with these bacteria are difficult to treat and require special types of antibiotics.

WHY ARE WE WORRIED ABOUT MRSA?

Since MRSA can cause serious infections, especially in people with weakened immune system, it is important to prevent it from spreading in places such as hospitals and nursing homes. These are places where there are always many vulnerable and susceptible people and it is our common responsibility to protect them as best we can from MRSA infections.

HOW IS MRSA SPREAD?

MRSA is transmitted primarily through direct contact between people, mostly through close contact. This can be people living in the same household but also through regular handling of bedding and clothing. The bacterium can survive for long periods in normal household dust.

WHO SHOULD BE SCREENED FOR MRSA?

Anyone who may have been exposed to MRSA and is going to work or be admitted as a patient in a Norwegian hospital or nursing home should be screened for MRSA.

People who work in pig farms should also be tested for MRSA if they may have been exposed to MRSA.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN IF I AM A CARRIER OF MRSA?

If you have been told that you are a carrier of MRSA this means that MRSA bacteria have been found on your body. Being a carrier of MRSA bacteria does not mean that you are sick. However, even if you are not sick you can still infect others.

If you know, or suspect you are a carrier of MRSA and are going into a healthcare facility as either a patient or a visitor, it is important that you tell the people who work there. This allows the staff to take the necessary precautions to protect vulnerable patients.

CAN I WORK IF I AM A CARRIER OF MRSA?

Yes, as long as you do not work in a Norwegian healthcare institution (nursing homes or hospital) or in pig farms. Follow the recommended precautions. Children can go to nursery and school. Neither school, kindergarten nor your employer (excluding hospitals/ nursing homes/ farms) needs to know that you carry MRSA.

Carrying MRSA should not hinder normal social contact.

HOW WILL I BE FOLLOWED-UP IF I AM MRSA POSITIVE?

If you are a carrier of MRSA you should contact your GP. You may become free of the bacteria without treatment, and thus treatment is often unnecessary. If you work with sick people or pigs you should undergo treatment to get rid of these bacteria (see separate section).

If you have MRSA and are hospitalized you must be isolated in a separate room. You must not move around the ward more than necessary. Staff will use yellow hospital gowns, gloves and face masks when they are in your room. You can have visitors but they must wash their hands well or use alcohol based hand rub before they leave the room.

WILL MY FAMILY NEED TO BE TESTED FOR MRSA IF I AM A CARRIER?

If someone you live with works in a healthcare institution or with livestock or will be hospitalized or admitted to a nursing home, they should be tested for MRSA. If you're going to start treatment, we recommend testing those that you live with first, prior to treatment. If some of them are also MRSA carriers you may become re-infected from them. Therefore, we advise treating all family members who have tested positive for MRSA at the same time.

WHAT CAN I DO TO AVOID INFECTING OTHERS?

Good hand hygiene is the most important measure to prevent infection. Clean and cover wounds and abrasions on the skin. Avoid sharing razors and towels with others. Be careful to cough /sneeze into your elbow, especially if you have MRSA in your throat.

ABOUT THE MRSA TEST

Your doctor or nurse uses a cotton swab to take samples. These are taken primarily from the nose, at the back of your throat and from the groin, but may also be taken from any wounds you might have. It takes a few days to get the test results. If you are hospitalized, you must be isolated until the test result is available.

ABOUT TREATMENT FOR MRSA

MRSA treatment is treatment to remove MRSA bacteria from the body. How treatment should be done will be decided by your doctor. The usual procedure is that you wash your body and hair with an antiseptic and apply an antibiotic ointment inside the nose. If bacteria are also found in your throat you should also gargle with a specific mouthwash twice a day (morning and evening). In addition, you have to change your sheets and clothes every day and wash them at 60 degrees. The whole treatment lasts 5-10 days.

After the treatment is complete, control samples are taken after one, two and three weeks. It is also advisable to take further samples after three, six and twelve months.

Sometimes it is necessary to carry out the treatment several times before it succeeds in clearing the bacteria.