Understanding MRSA

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For the benefit of our patients, visitors and staff, Northampton General Hospital operates a smoke-free policy. This means smoking is not allowed on the trust site, including all buildings, grounds and car parks.

Leaflets, information, friendly advice and support on giving up smoking and nicotine replacement therapy are available from the local Stop Smoking Help Line on (01604) 615272, or the free national helpline 0800 169069 and local pharmacies.

Car parking spaces are very limited here at Northampton General Hospital therefore please arrive early allowing additional time for parking or alternatively arrange to be dropped off and collected.
Q. What is MRSA?
- MRSA is the name used for the germ methicillin resistant Staphylococcus aureus.
- It is a form of Staphylococcus aureus.
- Staphylococcus aureus is a common bacterium, MRSA has become resistant to some antibiotics.
- MRSA is like many other germs, and can live on the skin and inside the nose.
- Healthy people are unlikely to experience any ill effects; they can go about their daily business as usual.
- Problems only arise if the MRSA germ gets into an open wound, and this causes an infection. It then becomes more difficult to treat because it has become resistant to the common antibiotics used to treat Staphylococcus Aureus.

Q. If MRSA is resistant to common antibiotics does this mean that you can’t treat infections caused by the germ?
- No, MRSA is treatable by some antibiotics.

Q. Can I only catch MRSA in hospital?
- It is a myth that you can only catch MRSA in hospital.
- MRSA exists in the community and many patients come into hospital with the bacteria on their skin without them knowing they have it.
Within the Trust, wards are divided into areas of risk, in accordance with the MRSA guidelines - based on the clinical consequences of infection occurring in patients on these wards.

- Where the consequences of infection are high to the patient, they have swabs taken for MRSA on admission or at the pre-admission clinic.

Patients do not always fit exactly into a specific category. Patients in all areas are assessed to identify their own risk of developing an infection or if they pose an increased risk to others.

- If patients are found to be positive with MRSA they may be asked to use an antiseptic wash to reduce the number of MRSA germs on their skin and they may receive an antibiotic nasal cream.

- Wherever possible in a high-risk area, MRSA positive patients are treated within separate areas to prevent the transfer of the germ to other vulnerable patients. They are assessed on an individual basis to ensure that they receive the most appropriate care.

Q. Is there anything else that can be done to stop MRSA?

As a patient or visitor, there are things that you can do to protect yourself and reduce the risk of spreading MRSA.

- Remember to either wash your hands or alcohol gel them on entering and leaving wards.

- Ask healthcare staff and your visitors if they have washed or used the alcohol gel on their hands before they touch you.

Q. If hospitals were cleaner would MRSA disappear?

- No, obviously cleanliness is important but it is not the entire answer. Hand hygiene and the use of aprons are all important. However, even with these measures in place there is still a small risk of acquiring MRSA.