The Neonatal Unit, John Radcliffe Hospital

Screening for Methicillin-Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) in Babies

Information for parents
This leaflet tells you about MRSA screening of your baby on admission to the neonatal unit (NNU).

What is MRSA?

MRSA stands for methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*. Everyone carries germs on their skin, and mostly these are harmless. *Staphylococcus aureus* is a common germ that is found on the skin and in the nose of about a third of healthy people. MRSA is a particular type of *Staphylococcus aureus* that has developed resistance to an antibiotic called methicillin and to some other commonly used antibiotics. ‘Resistance’ means that the germ is not killed by a particular antibiotic.

What is the difference between colonisation and infection with MRSA?

Many bacteria live on the skin – this is called colonisation. Most of the time MRSA lives harmlessly on the skin, but occasionally it can enter the body and cause harm – this is called MRSA infection.

Infections with MRSA or with *Staphylococcus aureus* can range from simple skin infections, e.g. boils or pimples, to more serious infections, e.g. wound or bloodstream infections.

The following factors may make babies more vulnerable to infection:

- their underlying medical condition, including being premature
- the presence of open wounds
- plastic in normally sterile sites, e.g. intravenous drips and central venous catheters
Why does my baby need an MRSA screen?

If we can find out whether your baby is carrying MRSA harmlessly on their skin we can then plan their care more effectively. It is helpful to know if your baby is carrying MRSA as this affects the antibiotics we would use to prevent or treat infections.

What is an MRSA screen?

Staff in the clinic or ward will explain the procedure to you and ask for your consent. They will then take swabs from your baby’s nose and send them to the laboratory for MRSA testing. Results from these swabs are usually available in 2-3 working days. If the swabs grow MRSA we will inform you.

What will happen if the swabs are positive?

If your baby is found to be carrying MRSA, don’t worry – he or she is unlikely to suffer any harm. Carrying MRSA is no different from carrying other bacteria on the skin. However, if your baby develops an infection, we will use a different choice of antibiotics to treat your baby. Even though MRSA is resistant to some of the commonly used antibiotics, it can still be treated with alternative antibiotics.

For babies who are found to be MRSA positive, the medical staff will assess which is the best place for your baby to receive care, and sometimes this may mean that they are nursed in a cubicle. The nurses and doctors wear gloves and aprons and decontaminate their hands when touching all babies on the NNU. This prevents the spread of bacteria such as MRSA to other babies, some of whom may have a higher risk of developing an infection.
Can we remove MRSA from the skin?
If your baby is colonised with MRSA and is going to have surgery or the insertion of an intravenous long-line, we will use a decontamination treatment in order to reduce the amount of MRSA on the skin. This involves using antiseptic wash cloths before the procedure. This process is unlikely to permanently remove MRSA from the skin.

Will MRSA stop my baby having an operation or other treatments?
No, MRSA will not prevent operations or other treatments.

Will my baby be tested more than once for MRSA?
Swabs will be taken on admission, every Monday whilst your baby is on the NNU, and on discharge.

If your baby does require surgery or invasive procedures we may re-test him/her to find out if MRSA is still present on the skin. And, if your baby is transferred to another hospital in the future, it is helpful to check if MRSA is still present.

What if I am carrying MRSA?
Washing your hands and applying gel will prevent the spread of MRSA to other babies in the NNU. Please be extra careful to make sure that you do this.
Do I need to do anything different when I come to visit my baby if s/he is carrying MRSA?

Good hand hygiene will prevent the spread of MRSA to other babies on the NNU. Please wash and gel your hands on entering the NNU, and wash or gel your hands before and after handling your baby.

Will my baby always have MRSA?

Outside of hospital other bacteria that are not resistant to antibiotics eventually replace MRSA.

Are there any risks to other members of my family?

MRSA is no greater risk to healthy individuals than the other bacteria that we all carry on our skin. Family members who frequently come into hospital should tell the doctor they see that a close family member has MRSA.

Do I need to continue such rigorous hand washing once my baby goes home?

No. Eventually the MRSA will be replaced by bacteria that are not resistant to antibiotics.
Further Information

For further information about MRSA please ask to speak to the clinical team on duty, or contact:

- Infection Control Team: Tel: 01865 220853
- NHS Direct: Tel: 0845 4647
- Royal College of Nursing: www.rcn.org.uk/
- Health Protection Agency: www.hpa.org.uk/
If you need an interpreter or need a document in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221473**. When we receive your call we may transfer you to an interpreter. This can take some time, so please be patient.

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