Screening for patients known to be MRSA positive or at risk of acquiring MRSA

Introduction
The aim of this booklet is to let you know why screening for methicillin resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) is being offered to you.

What is Staphylococcus aureus?
Staphylococcus aureus (Staph aureus) is a bacterium (bug) that is found living harmlessly on the skin and in the nose of about 20%–40% of the population. Sometimes, however, these bacteria can cause infections of the skin, like boils and abscesses. It is the most commonly known cause of wound infections.

Staphylococcus aureus can be more of a threat to hospital patients, especially if the bacteria enter the body. Illnesses such as skin and wound infections, urinary tract infections (water infections), pneumonia (chest infection) and bacteraemia (bloodstream infection) may then develop. People who are unwell can be vulnerable to these kinds of infections, which can be quite serious.

Why are we concerned about MRSA?
MRSA behaves in exactly the same way as Staphylococcus aureus and can cause the same range of infections. This bug, however, is resistant to the antibiotic methicillin. In other words, some common antibiotics, such as penicillin and flucloxacillin, cannot treat MRSA infections. Other antibiotics are still effective but some are difficult to use and are more expensive.

Why be so cautious about MRSA in hospital?
Given the opportunity, bacteria will enter the body and can cause an infection. In a hospital setting there are sick people being nursed together, some of whom will have drips and catheters. We have to limit the risk of spreading bacteria between our patients.

How is MRSA spread?
MRSA can be passed between patients in hospital. MRSA (and Staph aureus) is mainly spread by touch, via hands. It is therefore important for staff to wash their hands regularly and to use the alcohol foam.

Which people are more vulnerable to acquiring MRSA?
MRSA can affect elderly people and those with long-term health problems, and generally does not harm healthy people. It is important to remember that MRSA is not found just in hospitals or care homes. People living in the community can also carry the bug.

You may be at an increased risk of developing MRSA in hospital, if you:
- are known to have been MRSA positive in the past
- live in a nursing or residential home
- are transferred directly from another hospital
- have been a hospital inpatient in the previous six months
- have a long-term invasive device fitted by a healthcare worker, e.g. urinary catheter or Hickman line
- have a long-term invasive device fitted by yourself, e.g. a urinary catheter
- are known to be diabetic
- are having renal dialysis treatment
- are healthcare workers from the community or acute setting.

How long will it take to know the results?
It can take between two and five days to know your swab results. If you have been discharged before your results are known and you are MRSA positive, your GP will be sent a copy.

It is usually not necessary for any further treatment once you have been discharged. What happens if you are identified as having MRSA?
- you will be asked to wash using antiseptic solution in place of soap, every day for five days. You will be asked to wash your hair with the antiseptic solution twice during this five day period
- nasal antibiotic ointment will be prescribed for five days if MRSA is found in your nose
- specific antibiotics may be prescribed if there are signs of infection, on the advice of a consultant microbiologist. You may be moved into a single room to reduce the risk of spreading MRSA to another patient
- 48 hours after completion of treatment, swabs will be taken again. This process will be repeated during your hospital stay, up to three times
- if you are on treatment when you are discharged, the course should be completed. When you leave hospital, your GP (or hospital doctor if you are being transferred) is usually informed of your MRSA status and treatment. In the following instances, however, staff should be informed that you have MRSA:
  - before attending an outpatients appointment, visiting your GP (if he or she is unaware), or dentist
  - before admission to a hospital, nursing or residential home.

You can help yourself and other patients by:
- always washing and drying your hands after visiting the toilet and before you eat
- not touching your wound or any device, e.g. a drip, drain or catheter that is in your arm, leg, bladder or other body cavity
• not exposing your wound to show your visitors
• keeping the space around your bed tidy and uncluttered so that the cleaning staff can get to all surfaces easily. Your visitors or relatives can help to do this
• telling your nurse if you notice any unclean or dusty areas
• showering/washing as frequently as you can, e.g. daily
• asking your relatives and friends not to visit in large groups, and not to visit if they are feeling unwell
• asking your visitors to wash and dry their hands thoroughly before and after entering the ward and to not sit on your bed or use the patients' toilets
• not sharing possessions or equipment with other patients, unless it has been cleaned
• washing and drying your hands before and after helping other patients
• reminding staff about hand washing and drying if they forget. Don't worry – they won't be offended.

Thank you for your co-operation.

For more information on MRSA, please speak to the nursing staff on your ward, your doctor or the infection control nurses. The infection control nurses can be contacted by calling 01206 744268 during office hours.

Verifying your identity
When you attend hospital you will be asked to confirm your first and last names, date of birth, postcode and NHS number if you know it, and to let us know if you have any allergies.

Comments, compliments or complaints about your care
It is sensible to raise any concerns straight away in the ward or department you are in. Ask to speak with the ward sister, matron or department manager, as appropriate.

If your concerns cannot be resolved or you wish to make a formal complaint, please call PALS (Patient Advice and Liaison Service) on freephone 0800 783 7328, pick up a PALS leaflet or visit www.colchesterhospital.nhs.uk/pals.

Your views
If you or a family member has recently been in Colchester General Hospital, you can tell us about your experience by searching for ‘Colchester’ on the NHS Choices website (www.nhs.uk), by writing to the address on the front of this leaflet, by emailing your comments to info@colchesterhospital.nhs.uk or by filling in a ‘Friends & Family’ questionnaire at the hospital, telling us if you would recommend our service to a friend or family member.