As a patient or visitor you may be concerned about MRSA or have been told you have it.

What is it?
MRSA stands for Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus

What does it cause?
It is a bug/germ (bacterium). The staphylococcus aureus Bacterium is very common, in fact, 1 in 3 of us carry it naturally. The staphylococci group of bacteria are the most common cause of skin and wound infections.

This particular type of staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) has developed resistance to the antibiotic Methicillin, as well as many others; But not all antibiotics. ‘Resistance’ means that the bacteria are no longer killed by these antibiotics.

MRSA can sit on the skin without causing any harm. It only becomes a problem when the bacterium enters the body or bloodstream.

How does this Happen?
The bacterium can enter through a cut or wound. They can also enter when a needle is used to puncture the skin when you are in hospital.

How is it diagnosed?
It is important to know whether you are carrying MRSA upon admission to hospital or before an operation. In order to help us reduce the risks of infection we screen patients by taking swabs. If you do not have any wounds, one will be taken from your nose and one from your perineum (in men, it is the area between the scrotum and the anus, in women it is the area between the bottom of the vaginal opening and the anus.) Patients coming into hospital the Emergency Care Centre are swabbed for MRSA in the nose and throat. It is important to use these areas as this is where the bacteria find it easiest to multiply. Sometimes we will swab a wound if we suspect it is infected.

These swabs are sent off to our laboratory and results are usually known within 48 hours.

What happens if the MRSA Bacterium is on the skin?
The most important thing is not to panic. You are unlikely to suffer any harm or pass it on to anyone else.

You may be colonised with MRSA. This means the bacteria are simply ‘sitting’ on the skin causing no harm. If you have a positive result like this, sometimes people are referred to as MRSA carriers.
If the swab was taken from a break in the skin, such as a cut or ulceration, it may be causing an MRSA infection.

Signs of infection include:

- Pain
- Redness
- Swelling
- Fever
- Pus

If you find yourself either colonised or infected, again, try not to worry. The sooner we get a result, the sooner we can commence decolonisation or treatment.

What happens if you are colonised?
You will prescribed a 5 day course of treatment. This contains a body wash, called Hibiscrub (a red antiseptic liquid designed to help prevent & fight infections) and a nasal antibiotic cream containing Mupirocin.

You will need to use the Hibiscrub as a shower gel once a day, paying particular attention to the area under your arms and your groin. You will need to wash your hair with the Hibiscrub at least twice during the 5 day course.

The Mupirocin is applied three times a day to the inner surface of each nostril; your nurse will show you how to do this. Once the course is finished we will wait for two days and then as long as you are not on any antibiotics, we will repeat your swabs to confirm decolonisation.

What if I get an infection?
The Trust’s Infection Control Team will notify the doctors and nurses looking after you. We will advise on the best course of action on an individual basis. This may include antibiotics and depending on the site of infection, you may be nursed in a side room to prevent other patients getting the infection.

How can I prevent it happening to me or others?
You can dramatically reduce the likelihood of getting any form of infection by always checking that staff have washed their hands or used the alcohol hand gel before they care for you.

It is important that you wash your hands regularly (after contact with other patients or staff, before and after going to the toilet and before and after meals etc.) You should also remind your visitors to wash their hands or use the alcohol hand gel before and after visiting. The Trust has clear rules about visiting, and these are can found in the Trust’s visitors charter leaflet (available on the ward), please ask a member of staff for more information.
If you are visiting a patient with an infection always check with the ward staff about any precautions that should be taken before the visit, to reduce the spread of infection in our hospitals.

Further information
If you have any further questions, please ask your nurse to contact the infection control team by telephoning 01782 554282.