



11. The care and welfare of PAT dogs & PAT cats - MRSA

Facts about MRSA

- MRSA stands for Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus
- MRSA is often referred to as a hospital "super-bug" and is responsible for 5,000 patient deaths a year in UK hospitals
- MRSA is a bacterium that many of us carry around harmlessly on our skin
- MRSA only causes problems when it gets into the blood stream, particularly in those with weakened immune systems and can be fatal
- The super-bug has developed resistance to modern antibiotics and so is very difficult to treat
- It can survive for up to 12mths in hospital dust, bedding and clothing

How is MRSA spread?

- By direct contact or through the air, such as by sneezing or coughing
- Carried by people on their clothes and other objects from one environment to another
- People working in healthcare settings (medical and veterinary) may have a higher risk of being carriers than the general population

What does the British Medical Association say?

- Compliance with hand hygiene protocols limits the spread of pathogens such as MRSA
- Hand-washing with a non-medicated liquid soap and water are effective for soiled skin
- Alcohol hand-wipes are recommended for routine use if the skin is not soiled
- Wear clothes that minimise spread of infection: cuffs, collars and ties are associated with increased transmission and where possible change clothes when leaving the clinical setting
- Always wash clothes between use even if they appear to be clean

What are the risks to my PAT dog or PAT cat?

- Unfortunately, there is no research investigating the spread of MRSA in therapy animals
- Pets are most likely to become infected during surgery at a veterinary practice where the bacterium can infect open wounds via contaminated instruments or hands, or from droplets from the nose or mouth of a veterinary surgeon
- The risks to your animal of contracting MRSA whilst on a routine PAT visit can be minimised by following the following precautions
- Never take your animal on a Pets As Therapy visit if it is unwell, or has any open wounds or cuts
- Always check with the establishment whether they have any notifiable diseases on the ward
- Never take your PAT dog or cat to visit a patient who is known to have MRSA or has uncovered wounds or lesions
- Always wash your hands after a PAT visit and use alcohol hand wipes between patients
- Wear your PAT t-shirt on visits and keep it clean
- Make sure your PAT dog or cat coat is clean

What does the Bella Moss Foundation say?

- At risk animals include those with weakened immune systems, those undergoing surgery or spending prolonged periods of time at the veterinary surgery
- It is certainly possible that close contact with a pet can spread MRSA to a person although it is not known how often this happens and what the risk factors are
- Good overall cleanliness goes a long way to preventing and minimising the problem

What does the British Small Animal Veterinary Association say?

- The 3 key points are: Scrupulous hand-washing; a clean environment and prudent antibiotic use