

## **What do I do when my pet is diagnosed with MRSA Infection?**

### **1. People in contact with your pet:**

MRSA is not usually a problem for healthy people as they have a natural bacterial flora and their immune system to protect them. Some healthy people and pets even carry MRSA in their nose or mouth as part of their normal flora. However, if an individual has underlying health problems, they will be at increased risk for acquiring infection from contact with your pet just as from contact with MRSA-carrying people. You need to identify anyone in your household who might be at a higher risk and those individuals should not be involved in the daily care for your pet. You should discuss this with your GP by telling him or her that your pet has been diagnosed with MRSA infection.

### **2. Risk of re-infection to your pet**

Your vet will have started your pet on medication to treat the MRSA infection (often antibiotic tablets, capsules, injections and sometimes creams). In some cases of wound infection, the infection can be resolved before the wound has healed completely. In those circumstances it is important to reduce MRSA from the environment to prevent MRSA contaminating the wound and starting infection again. While MRSA cannot survive on dry surfaces for very long, people, other animals in the house and the patient itself may all carry MRSA in the nostrils, in the mouth or on their fur without any harm to their bodies. In order to prevent re-infection of your pet from humans or other animals you can ask your GP to take a swab for MRSA from your nose and your vet may do the same with other pets living in your house (you will be asked to cover the cost as part of the treatment regime for your pet). Once you know whether you or other family members carry MRSA you can either treat it (your GP will advise you on this) or you can avoid contact with your pet or wear a mask to prevent MRSA transfer from you to your pet.

### **3. Aftercare**

Wound management will be very similar to the handling of any other infected wound. Your vet will advise you on this (medication, collar, bandages etc) as each wound is different and needs individual assessment. However, should you encounter any problems in following your vet's advice, for example, if your pet refuses to take the tablets or resists having the wound inspected, tell your vet immediately. MRSA infection is difficult to treat but for most animal patients, medication is still available for successful treatment provided it can be given correctly. Communication between you and your vet is very important in dealing with these infections and you should let your vets know if you are worried about the progress of wound healing (redness, discharge, odour) so that they can re-assess changes. Sometimes, repeated swabs or a change in medication becomes necessary as the bacteria involved in wound infections can change during therapy.

### **4. Hygiene precautions**

The most important means of preventing the spread of any infection, including MRSA, is good hygiene. If your pet has been diagnosed with MRSA infection, hand washing, the single most important factor of preventing spread of bacteria amongst individuals, should be carried out before and after stroking your pet, before and after dealing with the wound, after coming home from work and before going out, in addition to the usual hand washing occasions during the day. Jewellery should be removed prior to handling your pet. Hands should be washed under warm flowing water using soap or an antiseptic solution (according to the manufacturers' instructions if those are given). Take care to rub all areas of the skin thoroughly including the thumbs, finger tips and the back of your hands. This process should take one to two minutes before thorough rinsing. Hands should then be dried with disposable paper towels or frequently washed hand towel that is not used for other purposes.

Bandages from your pet should be disposed of in separate plastic bin bags immediately. Avoid letting them lie around where they could be dragged around and avoid contact of the bandages with floors, furniture or bedding. It may be helpful to keep your pet confined to an area where floors can be wiped easily, e.g. a tiled room downstairs.

In summary, general hygiene procedures such as cleanliness, frequent and thorough hand washing and careful handling of bandage material will aid the treatment of your pet's MRSA infection. However, successful treatment will depend on a combination of various factors such as hygiene, appropriate medication and close monitoring of progress, which is where communication between you and your vet becomes very important.

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