



Serratia Marcescens

Infection Control Information for Health Care Workers

What is Serratia?

Serratia is a bacteria which is found in soil, water and plants and thrives in moist environments.

It is also frequently present in hospitals. Some people may carry Serratia in the bowel or respiratory tract without it causing ill-health. Serratia may also be present on hospital equipment and furnishings. The most common mode of spread is by direct contact.

Colonisation vs Infection

Colonisation means the bacteria is carried in the bowel or respiratory tract without causing active disease. Being colonised does not mean that an infection will necessarily develop.

Infection means that signs and symptoms of infection are present. The site of infection can vary. Infections caused by this bacteria include: meningitis, bacteraemia, conjunctivitis, urinary tract infection and skin infections.

Who is affected?

Serratia may cause infections in patients in hospitals, especially those who are very sick.

Although rare, Serratia has been known to cause outbreaks of infection in these sorts of patients.

Serratia does not cause infection in the healthy people who are colonised. Serratia does not pose a health risk to the general public or to hospital staff and visitors.

Screening

Routine screening of patients for Serratia is not recommended.

Screening may be useful in an outbreak investigation or as a measure to monitor the effectiveness of infection control interventions during an outbreak.

Once colonised long term carriage should be presumed and screening to prove elimination is not needed.

The method of screening should be decided by clinicians, infection control and laboratory staff. Expert laboratory advice should be sought before screening is commenced.

Environmental screening in an outbreak may be helpful to find an environmental source of the bacteria. It is important that the sampling methods and the laboratory are accredited to undertake this type of specialised testing.

**For more information
contact your local
infection control team**

Preventing spread

In the non-outbreak setting,

Standard precautions are normally sufficient to prevent transmission of the bacteria.

In the event of an outbreak of infection, **Contact precautions** and cohorting of patients infected or colonised with the bacteria are considered important components of an infection control plan.

Gloves and gown are worn on contact with the patient or their environment.

Equipment linen and waste

All patient care equipment must be cleaned between patient uses.

Linen and waste are handled using Standard Precautions.

Hand hygiene

Unless hands are visibly soiled alcohol based hand rub or gel is the preferred method of hand hygiene.

Ensure hand hygiene is performed according to your local infection control policies and procedures.

Remember Serratia is a benign organism and transmission can be prevented by adherence to good hand hygiene and Standard Precautions.