

# PETS AS THERAPY

## The Care and Welfare of Your PAT Dog and PAT Cat – 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 12 months 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 uses 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 Pets As Therapy 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 Pets As Therapy visit and use alcohol hand wipes between patients.
- Wear your Pets As Therapy top on visits and keep it clean.
- Make sure your PAT Dog or PAT Cat’s uniform is clean

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### 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.
- prudent antibiotic use.

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