1 in 4 nursing home residents carry MRSA

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MRSA is a major problem in nursing homes with one in four residents carrying the bacteria, a study by Queen's University Belfast and Antrim Area Hospital has found.

Its authors say that the findings, which have been published in the Journal of the American Geriatrics Society, highlight the need for infection control strategies to be given a higher priority in nursing homes.

The study, thought to be the largest of its kind studying MRSA in private nursing homes in the UK, took nose swabs from 1,111 residents and 553 staff in 45 nursing homes in the former Northern Board area of Northern Ireland.

Twenty-four per cent of residents and 7 per cent of staff were found to be colonised with MRSA, meaning they were carrying the bacteria but not necessarily showing signs of infection or illness.

Residents in 42 of the homes were colonised with MRSA, with recorded rates in individual nursing homes ranging from zero to 73 per cent.

Staff in 28 of the homes carried the bacteria with prevalence rates ranging from zero to 28 per cent.

Dr Paddy Kearney, Consultant Medical Microbiologist with the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, said: "We decided to carry out the study after noticing an apparent increase in recent years in the

number of patients who had MRSA when they were admitted to hospital from nursing homes.

"In hospitals routine checks are carried out to identify those most at risk of MRSA colonisation (carrying it on their skin and/or nose) and infection control policies are put in place but this is not always feasible in private nursing homes."

Dr Michael Tunney, Senior Lecturer in Clinical Pharmacy, from Queen's University's School of Pharmacy, said: "This is the first study which has reported prevalence of MRSA among staff in nursing homes in the UK and found that staff need to be more aware of the potential problem MRSA can be in this setting."

Professor Carmel Hughes, a Director of Research in the School of Pharmacy, added: "In order to combat this problem, two approaches could be considered: improved education and training of staff, and removing MRSA from people who are colonised with it, using suitable creams and washes.

"Further studies looking at these approaches need to be carried out."

Source: Queen's University Belfast

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