

Wrist so how did I blame the doctors



SVEN ARNSTEIN / STAY STILL / DAVID POOLE / BBC / GETTY

MRSA situation in NHS hospitals has improved in the four years since she was infected, and is pleased that infection rates are falling. Hospitals are now routinely deep cleaned and bug-killing gel washes are standard outside wards, so that patients, visitors and medical staff can clean their hands on entering and leaving. In January, a strategy for controlling infections such as MRSA was

set out. There was also a recent nationwide campaign warning people about the overuse of antibiotics, which can lead to antibiotic-resistant infections. This is something Tina feels strongly about. 'I'm very careful not to take antibiotics or to give them to Isabella unless we really need them,' she says. 'Some bugs are good for us - we need them for our immune systems

Going into hospital? Here's how to protect yourself

Up to 30 per cent of the population carries the MRSA bug harmlessly on their skin. The bacterium gathers mainly in the nose and is easily spread via the fingers. It becomes a problem only when it enters the body via a wound or catheter site - when a tube is passed into one of the passages in the body - where it causes infection and fever. Drug-resistant MRSA can be treated only with a toxic antibiotic vancomycin, given intravenously for at least ten days, with side-effects that include kidney damage. Here Professor Mark Enright, public health expert at Imperial College London, offers his advice:



- MRSA is spread by hospital workers who don't wash their hands.
- You can also give MRSA to yourself if you have it on your skin.
- If you are going for an operation, visit your GP and ask to be tested.
- If you are a carrier, before you go to hospital use antibiotic creams from your GP and a special wash that kills the bacteria.
- It's a good idea to ask staff whether they have washed their hands before they touch you. The onus should not be on patients to protect themselves, however, but the responsibility of the staff to decontaminate themselves.
- MRSA may be present on clothing, instruments and surfaces, where it will stay indefinitely until it is destroyed by cleaning.
- Disinfectants, bleach, chlorine, and alcohol-based wipes and washes are effective.
- Some hospitals don't allow flip-flops for fear MRSA could be transferred from the floor to the feet.

to work properly.' She has nothing but praise for the nursing profession. 'I'm in awe of how hard they work, how difficult a job they do in tough conditions, and just how dedicated they are - all for pay which is a joke. More of our taxes should go to nurses, and less to the roads. 'I feel an affinity with nurses - and often people do confuse reality and fiction and think I'm really a nurse - but I couldn't do the job for real. 'I'm just a pretend nurse; I play at it. Fortunately, the nurses I meet are usually very positive about Chrissie in Holby. They say she's quite a realistic portrayal of a ward sister - if you take away the lipgloss and the bed-hopping with surgeons, and the psychopathic boyfriends! But that's just artistic licence.'

She adds: 'My nursing skills have never been tested. I could probably put up a drip if I was pushed, but I'd be useless in an emergency. I'm very squeamish and can't stand the sight of blood - which might be a bit of a problem.'

As she counts the days until she gives birth, Tina is looking forward to a few months away from Holby City with her baby. She will return in the summer, but she doesn't know what storylines are in store for Chrissie. 'They won't tell me if Chrissie still has her scar when she comes back. In a way I

hope she does. It would be a cop-out if she came back looking perfect.' She is trying not to get too nervous about her impending hospital admission. 'I'm keeping busy, getting things ready for the baby,' she says. 'Oli is very worried about me going into hospital. He's made sure I've had lots of screening to show I'm MRSA-free, and as healthy as possible. I try not to think about it too much but it's always there, at the back of my mind.'

Tina is philosophical about her experience of contracting MRSA. 'In the end, I don't just blame the doctors or the hospital for my infection - we all have to take responsibility for MRSA. We have to make sure that we wash our hands thoroughly before we go into a hospital ward, and after we come out. We all have to be vigilant. 'What happened to me was a wake-up call. It made me realise how precious my health is and how vulnerable we all are. Something like MRSA can just sneak up behind you when you least expect it and knock you down. 'In the future, I will make sure that if I am in hospital I ask the doctor to put on a mask and clean gloves before I allow them to touch me. 'I'll say, "Please would you wash your hands" and "Please can you not breathe over my wound." I've learned from my experience. You can't be shy, you must speak up.'

DOCTOR DOCTOR

Q How do GPs decide which consultant to refer a patient to?

A Generally, they choose ones they know either through reputation or previous working relationships. If you have a particular preference we would also be guided by that.

SHOCK AND GORE ... THE TOP MEDICAL MUSEUMS

By Caroline Bellamy

You may have dreamed of becoming a doctor or perhaps you are curious about the history of our nation's health. Whether you fancy trying out simulation key-hole surgery or seeing what a 19th Century dentist's drill looks like, these museums are well worth a visit.

● **The Thackray Museum, Beckett St, Leeds, www.thackray-museum.org**
Visitors can experience life as a character in the Victorian slums of 1840, with authentic sights, sounds and smells. There's a 'Pain, Pus and Blood' exhibition showing what surgery without anaesthetics was like. In the interactive Life Zone you can enter a giant gut and explore the human body.

● **The Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons, Nicolson St, Edinburgh, www.rcsed.ac.uk**
The RCS, once a teaching museum for medical students, has been open to the public since 1832, making it Scotland's oldest museum. It houses one of the largest collections of historic surgical material in the UK. Visitors can trace the history of surgery from Roman times to the present day, and try simulation key-hole surgery.

● **Old Operating Theatre Museum, St Thomas St, London, SE1 9RY, www.thegarret.org.uk**
Hidden for almost a century in the roof of St Thomas's Church, this is Britain's only surviving 19th Century operating theatre. Used between 1821 and 1862, it was the scene of many a grisly operation, particularly before 1847 when anaesthetics



were introduced. Before then, surgery depended on swift technique (surgeons performed leg amputations in a minute or less) as well as alcohol to dull the senses.

● **Glenside Hospital Museum, Bristol, www.glensidemuseum.org.uk**
Strait-jackets, padded cells and post-mortem equipment - just some of the chilling artefacts on display at the former Glenside Hospital. Some date back to the 1850s when the hospital was known as Bristol Lunatic Asylum. Haunting paintings by Dennis Reed, an accomplished artist who painted life in Glenside from the inside, are also exhibited.

● **Army Medical Services Museum, Aldershot, www.ams-museum.org.uk**
From the English Civil Wars, to the Napoleonic and Boer Wars through to the Gulf conflict today, this museum covers the history of military medicine, veterinary science, nursing and dentistry. Displays include uniforms, medals, and insignia but also surgical instruments and military ambulances. ● *For more museums, go to www.mailonsunday.co.uk/healthattractions.*