

## Warrensburg R-VI School District Health Services Update: MRSA

Over the past few weeks both K-12 and college campuses have experienced cases of MRSA or Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus aureus. Media reports on the school shut-downs may have parents, students and even teachers wondering about the potential dangers associated with MRSA. This special update is an effort to provide parents with accurate and important information about this common skin infection.

### **What is Staph / MRSA?**

*Staphylococcus aureus*, often referred to as “staph,” is a common type of bacteria that lives harmlessly on the skin or in the nose of about 25% to 30% of the population. This is referred to as being “colonized” with the germ (when bacteria are present, but not causing an infection). Staph is also one of the most common causes of skin infection in the United States, but most of these infections are minor, such as pimples and boils, and can be treated without antibiotics. However, staph also can cause serious infections (such as surgical wound infections, bloodstream infections, and pneumonia).

MRSA is a type of staph that is resistant to a family of antibiotics commonly used to treat staph infections that include methicillin, penicillin and amoxicillin.

### **Who Gets Staph / MRSA?**

Staph infections, including MRSA, have been traditionally associated with outbreaks in health-care facilities, but they are becoming more common in students participating in contact sports, such as football and wrestling, and for children playing on playgrounds. Skin infections are generally spread by skin-to-skin contact or by direct contact with the infected wound drainage. MRSA may also be spread by contact with contaminated surfaces or objects such as sports equipment or personal hygiene items (razors, bar soap or towels). Skin infections often begin with an injury to the skin, such as a cut or scrape, which allows the bacteria to enter the skin and cause an infection. MRSA infections are not spread through the air.

### **What are the symptoms of MRSA?**

A Staph infection or MRSA usually presents as some type of skin or soft tissue infection such as a pimple, abscess, pustule or boil. These may appear red, swollen, painful, and/or have pus or other drainage. The pustules may be confused with spider bites initially and may also be associated with existing turf burns and/or abrasions.

Some people develop fever and chills.

### **What should I do if I think someone has a skin infection?**

If you suspect that someone might have a staph skin infection, have them consult their healthcare provider as soon as possible. Early treatment can help prevent the infection from getting worse. The person should be sure to follow all the directions the healthcare provider gives, including taking all of the doses of any prescribed antibiotic.

### **How do you prevent and control the spread of MRSA?**

Wash your hands frequently with soap and water or use 60% alcohol-based hand sanitizer if water is not available. Have students report any suspicious skin infection to the school nurse. Avoid contact with skin infections of others. Students involved in team sports should be aware of the following prevention guidelines:

### **Staph and/or MRSA Prevention for Athletes**

Although treatable, there can be complications associated with MRSA infections, making prevention the best measure to combat these infections. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) suggests the following measures for preventing staphylococcal skin infections, including MRSA:

1. **Practice good hand hygiene** by washing hands frequently and in a thorough fashion with soap and warm water or by using a 60% alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
2. Take a shower with hot water and wash with soap (liquid, not bar soap) following all activities (e.g. strength and conditioning sessions, practices, and competitions).
3. Avoid sharing towels, equipment, razors, soap, etc.
4. Use a barrier (e.g. clothing or a towel) between your skin and shared equipment.
5. Wipe surfaces of equipment before and after use.
6. Clean and properly cover any open wounds such as turf burns, abrasions, lacerations, etc. with an appropriate bandage at all times.
7. Avoid whirlpools, hydrotherapy pools, cold tubs, swimming pools, and other common tubs if you have an open wound.
8. Maintain clean facilities and equipment.
9. **Do not ignore skin infections**, pimples, ingrown hairs, boils, pustules, abscesses (often occurring in the area of the armpits, groin, neck and/or buttocks where staph bacteria colonize and thrive).

**Report any suspicious infection to your sports medicine staff member, team coach, school nurse, and/or personal physician immediately.**

Without proper referral and care, more serious infections may cause pneumonia, and bloodstream, bone and/or joint infections.

As a school district, we have been proactive in our approach to cleaning schools, gyms and cafeterias. We encourage you to do your part by being vigilant in looking for signs and symptoms of staph infection. If you or your child exhibits symptoms as described above, you are encouraged to contact your family physician. Everyone working together can help in the effective control and prevention of antibiotic resistant infections.

Patti White, RN, NCSN  
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For further information:

MRSA Update:

[www.dhss.mo.gov/SchoolHealth](http://www.dhss.mo.gov/SchoolHealth)

CDD Hand Hygiene:

[www.cdc.gov/handhygiene/](http://www.cdc.gov/handhygiene/)

CDC CA-MRSA Information

[http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar\\_mrsa\\_ca.html](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dhqp/ar_mrsa_ca.html)

Great resources for prevention

<http://www.tpchd.org/page.php?id=364>