



STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN RESOURCES

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Information for Parents and Schools on Community-associated Methicillin Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (CA-MRSA)

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What is *Staphylococcus aureus* (staph)?

Staphylococcus aureus, often simply referred to simply as “staph,” are bacteria commonly carried on the skin or in the nose of healthy people. Staph bacteria are one of the most common causes of skin infections in the United States. Most of these skin infections are minor (such as pimples and boils) and can be treated without antibiotics.

What is MRSA (methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*)?

Some staph bacteria are resistant to antibiotics. MRSA is a type of staph that is resistant to some common antibiotics. MRSA has been present for a long time in hospitals and health care facilities. The health-care strain affects persons who are ill and the strain is resistant to many antibiotics. A new community strain of MRSA commonly affects healthy persons and is sensitive to many antibiotics. This community strain is now the most common cause of skin infections in many communities in the U.S., including many communities in West Virginia.

What does a staph or MRSA infection look like?

Staph bacteria, including MRSA, can cause skin infections that may look like a pimple or boil and can be red, swollen, painful, or have pus or other drainage. In many cases, MRSA may be initially mistaken for a spider bite. More serious infections may include pneumonia, bloodstream infections, surgical wound infections or other deep infections.

How can staph or MRSA skin infections be prevented?

There are many things that we can do to prevent the spread of MRSA in our schools and our communities. Stressing the importance of good hygiene is vital in preventing the spread of MRSA in our schools and locker rooms. MRSA may be resistant to some of our strongest drugs, but it cannot resist hand washing.

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Recommendations for Prevention for the Spread of MRSA in Schools and Athletic Environments:

General Recommendations:

1. Avoid unnecessary antibiotic use. Antibiotic overuse causes antibiotic resistance.
2. Keep your hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
3. Avoid sharing personal and skin care items such as clothing, towels, washcloths, razors or balms.
4. Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healed, avoid contact with other people's wounds or bandages, and wash hands immediately after changing a bandage.
5. Seek medical attention immediately if a wound does not heal properly or appears to be infected.
6. MRSA is spread by people and shared personal items. It is not spread through the school building or furniture. Schools do not need to be closed to control the spread of MRSA. Routine daily and as-needed cleaning of bathrooms, locker rooms, kitchens, classrooms and other shared areas is recommended according to usual procedures.

Recommendations for Athletic Environments:

1. Cover all wounds. If wound cannot be covered, exclude the player with the wound.
2. Shower with soap after every practice or tournament. Use liquid soap dispensers in the team showers.
3. Discourage sharing of towels and personal items such as clothing or equipment.
4. Wash uniforms, clothes, towels, and sheets with water and laundry detergent. Dry clothes in a hot dryer.
5. Lockers, benches, showers, weight benches and other shared surfaces in athletic training facilities should be sanitized on a regular basis using disinfectant cleaners. A list of EPA-registered disinfectants effective against MRSA is available at: http://www.epa.gov/oppad001/list_g_mrsa_vre.pdf. Of course, 10% bleach, freshly mixed, is a highly effective disinfectant.
6. Train coaches in first aid for wounds and encourage athletes to report wounds to them.

How does one get a staph or MRSA infection?

MRSA is transmitted most frequently by direct skin-to-skin contact. You can protect yourself from infections by practicing good hygiene; covering any open skin area such as abrasions or cuts with a clean dry bandage; avoid sharing personal items such as towels or razors; using a barrier between your skin and shared equipment; and wiping surfaces of equipment before and after use.

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Are staph and MRSA infections treatable?

Yes. Most staph and MRSA infections are treatable. Warm soaks and incision and drainage ('lancing') are the basis for treatment of simple skin infections. If an antibiotic is prescribed, be sure to take the medication as prescribed, even if the infection is getting better. Do not share antibiotics with other people or save unfinished antibiotics to use at another time.

Remember that many staph skin infections may be treated by draining the abscess or boil and may not require antibiotics. Consult your doctor for advice.