

MAINE PUBLIC HEALTH ALERT NETWORK SYSTEM



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****ADVISORY – Important Information****

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TO: Before and After School Childcare; Child Care Centers; Childcare Resource Development Centers; Childcare Center; Head Start; Montessori Schools; Nursery Schools; On Site Daycare Centers; Preschools; School Administration; School Based Health Centers; School Nurses; YMCA YWCA Childcare; Public Private Colleges; All_required; EMS; Fire Departments; Hospital Lists; ICPS; ME Prim Care

FROM: Dora Anne Mills, M.D., M.P.H., Public Health Director

SUBJECT: Information on MRSA for Maine Schools

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Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC)
(Formerly Bureau of Health)

Information on Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA) for Maine Schools

The Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC) has received many recent inquiries related to Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA). MRSA is a bacterial infection that is easily spread and can be prevented through increased personal hygiene and environmental cleaning.

Background: MRSA is a type of staphylococcus bacteria that is resistant to certain types of antibiotics. The infection is most often spread through close skin to skin contact with drainage from a wound or lesion. It may also be transmitted by sharing personal items such as towels or clothing and by touching objects contaminated with the bacteria.

It is not always possible to identify who might carry or be infected with this type of bacteria. A person who once had MRSA and now does not have symptoms may either carry the organism (also referred to as colonized) or no longer have the organism in their body. Laboratory tests are needed to know for sure if a person carries MRSA or is free of it. Even with repeated tests, results may vary over time such that a person may be colonized at one time and not at another – this is true with or without treatment.

Recommendations: Maine CDC does not recommend restrictions for persons with MRSA unless an individual has a lesion with drainage that cannot be contained. School or work closures are not recommended. The best way to prevent the spread of MRSA and many other infectious diseases is to follow standard precautions. These recommendations include the following:

1. Clean hands regularly with soap and water or alcohol-based hand gel (if hands are not visibly soiled). Always clean hands immediately after touching infected skin or any item that has come in direct contact with a draining wound.
2. Keep all wounds that are draining covered with clean, dry bandages.
3. Avoid sharing personal items such as towels, clothing, bedding, bar soap, and athletic equipment that touches the skin.
4. Restrict activities that involve skin to skin contact with any individual that is unable to keep a wound covered with a clean, dry bandage at all times.
5. Any skin infection in a person who participates in activities that require skin to skin contact, like athletic teams, should be evaluated by a health professional before returning to contact activities (including practices), so that diagnostic testing and treatment (if appropriate) can be done.
6. Clean equipment and other frequently touched surfaces daily. Use a disinfectant that specifies *Staphylococcus aureus* on the product label and is suitable for the type of surface being cleaned, or make your own solution of bleach and water by mixing one tablespoon bleach into one quart of water. Frequently touched surfaces may include desks, door handles, countertops, and athletic equipment. MRSA can live on surfaces for months.

For assistance with a suspected outbreak of MRSA in a school or workplace, please immediately contact Maine CDC at 1-800-821-5821.

For More Information: Additional information on MRSA, including fact sheets, guidance for patients, and information on preventing MRSA is available at http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/boh/disease_methicillin-resistant.htm.