

Methicillin Resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA): Guidelines for Sports Teams



Maine Center for Disease
Control and Prevention

An Office of the
Department of Health and Human Services

John E. Baldacci, Governor

Brenda M. Harvey, Commissioner

What is MRSA?

- MRSA is a bacteria, a special form of *Staphylococcus aureus* ("Staph") that is resistant to many of the antibiotics that we usually use to treat Staph infections. Staph bacteria are the most common cause of skin infections.
- Like other forms of Staph, MRSA is commonly present on the skin or in the noses of healthy people without causing illness. It can also be carried in the armpit, groin, or genital area.
- When these bacteria get into a break in the skin, they can cause a skin infection. To determine whether an infection is caused by "regular" Staph or MRSA, a swab of pus or drainage from the wound is sent to the laboratory for testing.

What types of illnesses are caused by Staph bacteria including MRSA?

- The most common types of illnesses are skin infections such as pimples, rashes, or pus-filled boils that may be warm, painful, red, and/or swollen. *Impetigo* is one example of a skin infection that can be caused by Staph, including MRSA.
- Sometimes Staph, including MRSA, can cause more serious problems such as severe skin infection, bloodstream infections and pneumonia. Signs of these types of infections may include high fever, swelling, heat and pain around a wound, headache, fatigue, and others symptoms.

How is MRSA spread?

- MRSA is spread from person to person, mostly by direct skin-to-skin contact.
- People can also get MRSA when their skin comes into contact with items that have been contaminated by bacteria from wounds in people with a MRSA infection. This could happen by sharing towels or clothing/personal equipment or when exercise mats, weights, etc..., are not cleaned off after use.

How is MRSA treated?

- Athletes with skin infections should notify athletic or school nursing staff, and should be seen by a healthcare provider to see if treatment or and/or any tests are needed. Sometimes, skin infections need only good wound care and extra hygiene (e.g. keeping the area clean and dry, washing hands after caring for the area, carefully disposing of any bandages, and allowing the body to heal.
- Treatment of MRSA and other skin infections often requires the use of antibiotics. The antibiotics that are used to treat MRSA are different than the ones usually used to treat regular Staph. Decisions about treatment are made by doctors, nurse practitioners, or physician assistants.

How can I prevent MRSA infection among athletes?

Hand washing is the single most important behavior in preventing the spread of infectious disease. Emphasize this to your athletes.

Encourage Athletes to:

- Keep hands clean by washing them frequently with soap and warm water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer gel if hands are not badly soiled.
- Shower with soap and water *as soon as possible* after direct contact sports, and use a clean, dry towel.
- Do not share towels (even on the sidelines at a game), soap, razors, pads, or other personal care items.
- Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage until healed.
- Avoid contact with other people's wounds or bandages.
- Avoid whirlpools or common hot tubs, especially when having open wounds, scrapes, or scratches.
- Immediately inform their coach or athletic trainer if they think they have a skin infection.

- Wash towels, uniforms, scrimmage shirts, and other laundry in hot water and ordinary detergent, and dry on the hottest cycle after each use. Inform parents of these precautions if laundry is sent home (laundry must be in a plastic container or plastic bag for transporting home).

How should I clean the athletic equipment?

- Athletes should use a towel or clothing to act as a barrier between surfaces of shared equipment and bare skin.
- Clean the athletic area and sports equipment routinely—at least weekly—using a commercial disinfectant or a fresh (mixed daily) solution of 1 part bleach to 100 parts water (1 tablespoon bleach to 1 quart of water). For disinfection to occur, the surface must be clean, and there must be 10 minutes wet contact time.
- Clean equipment that comes into contact with bare skin such as mats and the surfaces of training tables, thoroughly after each use.
- Consider making spray bottles of disinfectant active against *Staphylococcus aureus* (as indicated on bottle label) available for use near high use equipment. Containers of disinfectant wipes may also be used.

Can an athlete continue to participate in sports if they are diagnosed with MRSA?

- Encourage the athlete to be evaluated by a healthcare provider.
- If the wound can be adequately covered (see below), and a health professional agrees, athletes may continue to participate in team activities, with the wound fully covered at all times.
- Considerations for continuing participation in the sport while the wound is still leaking fluid would include:
 - The ability to completely contain the drainage with a clean, dry bandage
 - Stability of equipment/padding that covers the wound
 - Amount of drainage
 - Location of the draining wound

- The nature of the contact. Frequent pressure on a bandaged wound (for example, against a piece of athletic equipment) may both delay healing and contaminate the point of contact.
- If there are multiple cases of MRSA in an athletic setting or there is an outbreak, more restrictive measures may be recommended by public health officials.

Do I need to alert parents and staff if an athlete has a MRSA infection?

When MRSA occurs within the school population, consult with the school nurse, school physician, or health service to determine whether some or all parents and staff should be notified. The appropriate health professional can then consult with the Maine CDC (1-800-821-5821). Decision making about notification of other students or parents must also involve the school administrations

Where can I get more information?

For more information you can contact the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention by calling 1-800-821-5821 or visiting the website <http://mainepublichealth.gov>.

Other useful websites include:

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <http://www.cdc.gov>
- Massachusetts Department of Public Health http://www.mass.gov/dph/cdc/antibiotic/antibiotic_home.htm