

MRSA: Information for Coaches and Athletes

An increasing number of outbreaks of skin infections on sports teams caused by *Staphylococcus aureus* ("staph") bacteria that are resistant to many antibiotics have been reported. These resistant strains of staph are known as "MRSA" (methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*).

What is a staph skin infection?

Staph bacteria are often found in the noses and on the skin of people. Most of the time staph carried in the nose or on the skin does not cause infection and when it does, it usually causes minor infections, such as boils or abscesses. However, sometimes staph can cause more serious infections such as pneumonia, joint, and bloodstream infections. Staph infections often begin when staph bacteria enter the body through an injury to the skin. Symptoms of a staph skin infection include redness, warmth, swelling, tenderness of the skin, and boils or blisters.

How do staph skin infections spread?

The cleanest person can get a staph infection. Staph can rub off the skin of an infected person and onto the skin of another person when they have skin-to-skin contact. Staph from an infected person can also get onto a commonly shared item or surface, and then get onto the skin of the person who touches it next. Examples of commonly shared items are towels, benches in saunas or hot tubs, and athletic equipment - in other words, anything that could have touched the skin of a staph infected person can carry the bacteria to the skin of another person.

What can be done to prevent infection among athletes?

Athletes should clean their hands and skin often. They should avoid skin-to-skin contact with anyone suspected of having a staph skin infection. Athletes should not share personal items (e.g., razors, towels, etc.) with other persons and should keep towels and clothes clean. Items that are shared with other people (e.g., towels, razors, athletic equipment) should be cleaned before reuse by another person.

What should I do if I think I an athlete has a skin infection?

If you suspect that an athlete 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 athlete should be sure to follow all the directions the healthcare provider gives, including taking all of the doses of any prescribed antibiotic.

If an athlete is diagnosed with an MRSA skin infection what should be done?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have developed the following recommendations for controlling MRSA outbreaks on sports teams:

1. Cover all wounds. If a wound cannot be covered adequately, consider excluding players with potentially infectious skin lesions from practice or competitions until the lesions are healed or can be covered adequately.
2. Encourage good hygiene, including showering and washing with soap after all practices and competitions.
3. Ensure availability of adequate soap and hot water.
4. Discourage sharing of towels and personal items (e.g., clothing or equipment)
5. Establish a routine cleaning schedule for all shared equipment.
6. Train athletes and coaches in first aid for wounds and recognition of wounds that are possibly infected.
7. Encourage athletes to report skin lesions to coaches and encourage coaches to assess athletes regularly for skin lesions.

If you have questions about MRSA, among athletes or suspect an outbreak and would like MDH assistance please call: 651-201-5414 or (toll-free) 877-676-5414.

Fact sheet adapted with permission from "Fact Sheet for Patients: Antibiotic-resistant 'Staph' Skin Infections" prepared by the Los Angeles Department of Health Services Public Health (www.lapublichealth.org)



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