



Rick Scott  
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## **WHAT IS MRSA?**

Staphylococcus aureus (commonly called “staph”) is a germ (bacteria) that can cause infection of the skin like pimples, boils or “spider bites”. Staph bacteria are one of the most common causes of skin infections as well as pneumonia, surgical wound infections and blood stream infections. Some staph bacteria, MRSA (methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus), are resistant to certain antibiotics and makes the infection difficult to treat. Staph infections, including MRSA, are most commonly spread through direct physical contact with an infected person. Transmission can also occur through contact with objects/surfaces that have become contaminated with MRSA. The occurrence of MRSA is on the rise in Florida as well as nationwide. Over the past several years, MRSA has become a concern among the athletic community, especially among participants of close contact sports. Clusters of MRSA infections have occurred among wrestlers, football players and even fencers.

## **WHAT CAN I DO TO PREVENT STAPH INFECTIONS?**

This document provides recommendations for preventing the occurrence and spread of staph and MRSA infections among athletic teams. Coaches, parents, athletes, referees and others involved in sporting events should become familiar with the signs and symptoms of infection and are encouraged to adhere to the following recommendations:

### **ATHLETES SHOULD:**

- Shower daily with soap and warm water, especially after practice events and competitions
- Wash hands with soap and warm water frequently. If proper hand washing facilities are not available, a waterless, alcohol based hand sanitizer is an acceptable alternative
- Do not share personal items with others. Personal items include, but are not limited to: sporting equipment, clothes, towels, razors and uniforms
- Clean all shared sporting and protective equipment between uses. A disinfectant used according to the manufacturer’s instructions or a 1:10 bleach/water solution are appropriate disinfectants
- Wash clothes and linens in hot water, soap and bleach (if available)
- Dry clothes and linens in a hot dryer; heat helps kill the bacteria
- Cover all wounds, particularly those that may be draining (wet), with a clean, dry bandage at all times
- Do not lance, pop or drain boils, wounds or other skin infections
- See a healthcare provider immediately if a skin infection develops
- Avoid participating in contact sporting events until wounds/skin infections are healed

### **What type of infections does MRSA cause?**

- In the community most MRSA infections are skin infections that may appear as pustules or boils which often are red, swollen, painful, or have pus or other drainage. These skin infections commonly occur at sites of visible skin trauma, such as cuts and abrasions, and areas of the body covered by hair (e.g., back of neck, groin, buttock, armpit, beard area of men).
- Almost all MRSA skin infections can be effectively treated by drainage of pus with or without antibiotics. More serious infections, such as pneumonia, bloodstream infections, or bone infections, are very rare in healthy people who get MRSA skin infections.

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### How is MRSA transmitted?

- MRSA is usually transmitted by direct skin-to-skin contact or contact with shared items or surfaces that have come into contact with someone else's infection (e.g., towels, used bandages).

### In what settings do MRSA skin infections occur?

- MRSA skin infections can occur anywhere.
- Some settings have factors that make it easier for MRSA to be transmitted.
  - These factors, referred to as the 5 C's, are as follows: Crowding, frequent skin-to-skin Contact, Compromised skin (i.e., cuts or abrasions), Contaminated items and surfaces, and lack of Cleanliness.
  - Locations where the 5 C's are common include schools, dormitories, military barracks, households, correctional facilities, and daycare centers.

### How do I protect myself from getting MRSA?

You can protect yourself by:

- practicing good hygiene (e.g., keeping your hands clean by washing with soap and water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer and showering immediately after participating in exercise);
- covering skin trauma such as abrasions or cuts with a clean dry bandage until healed;
- avoiding sharing personal items (e.g., towels, razors) that come into contact with your bare skin; and using a barrier (e.g., clothing or a towel) between your skin and shared equipment such as weight-training benches;
- maintaining a clean environment by establishing cleaning procedures for frequently touched surfaces and surfaces that come into direct contact with people's skin.

### Should schools close because of an MRSA infection?

- The decision to close a school for any communicable disease should be made by school officials in consultation with local and/or state public health officials. However, in most cases, it is not necessary to close schools because of an MRSA infection in a student. It is important to note that MRSA transmission can be prevented by simple measures such as hand hygiene and covering infections.

### Should the school be closed to be cleaned or disinfected when an MRSA infection occurs?

- Covering infections will greatly reduce the risks of surfaces becoming contaminated with MRSA. In general it is not necessary to close schools to "disinfect" them when MRSA infections occur. MRSA skin infections are transmitted primarily by skin-to-skin contact and contact with surfaces that have come into contact with someone else's infection.
- When MRSA skin infections occur, cleaning and disinfection should be performed on surfaces that are likely to contact uncovered or poorly covered infections.
- Cleaning surfaces with detergent-based cleaners or Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered disinfectants is effective at removing MRSA from the environment.
  - It is important to read the instruction labels on all cleaners to make sure they are used safely and appropriately.
  - Environmental cleaners and disinfectants should not be used to treat infections.
  - The EPA provides a list of EPA-registered products effective against MRSA:  
<http://epa.gov/oppad001/chemregindex.htm>

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**Should the entire school community be notified of every MRSA infection?**

- Usually, it should not be necessary to inform the entire school community about a single MRSA infection. When an MRSA infection occurs within the school population, the school nurse and school physician should determine, based on their medical judgment, whether some or all students, parents and staff should be notified. Consultation with the local public health authorities should be used to guide this decision.
- Remember that staphylococcus (staph) bacteria, including MRSA, have been and remain a common cause of skin infections.

**Should the school be notified that my child has an MRSA infection?**

- Consult with your school about its policy for notification of skin infections.

**Should students with MRSA skin infections be excluded from attending school?**

- Unless directed by a physician, students with MRSA infections should not be excluded from attending school.
- Exclusion from school and sports activities should be reserved for those with wound drainage ("pus") that cannot be covered and contained with a clean, dry bandage and for those who cannot maintain good personal hygiene.

**I have an MRSA skin infection. How do I prevent spreading it to others?**

- Cover your wound. Keep wounds that are draining or have pus covered with clean, dry bandages until healed. Follow your healthcare provider's instructions on proper care of the wound. Pus from infected wounds can contain staph, including MRSA, so keeping the infection covered will help prevent the spread to others. Bandages and tape can be discarded with the regular trash.
- Clean your hands frequently. You, your family, and others in close contact should wash their hands frequently with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer, especially after changing the bandage or touching the infected wound.
- Do not share personal items. Avoid sharing personal items, such as towels, washcloths, razors, clothing, or uniforms that may have had contact with the infected wound or bandage. Wash sheets, towels, and clothes that become soiled with water and laundry detergent. Use a dryer to dry clothes completely.

**It is essential for coaches, athletes, parents and other sporting event officials to enforce the recommendations described above. Strict adherence will help prevent the spread of MRSA infections among the athletic community.**

For further information, [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) or contact the Orange County Health Department, Epidemiology Program at 407-858-1420.

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## **Official Statement from the National Athletic Trainers' Association on Community-Acquired MRSA Infections (CA-MRSA)**

In an effort to educate the public about the potential risks of the emergence of community acquired methicillin - resistant staphylococcus infection (CA-MRSA), the National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) recommends that health care personnel and physically active participants take appropriate precautions with suspicious lesions and talk with a physician.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), approximately 25% to 30% of the population is colonized in the nose with Staphylococcus aureus, often referred to as "staph" and approximately 1% of the population is colonized with MRSA<sup>1</sup>.

Cases have developed from person-to-person contact, shared towels, soaps, improperly treated whirlpools, and equipment (mats, pads, surfaces, etc). Staph or CA-MRSA infections usually manifest as skin infections, such as pimples, pustules and boils, which present as red, swollen, painful, or have pus or other drainage. Without proper referral and care, more serious infections may cause pneumonia, bloodstream infections, or surgical wound infections.

Maintaining good hygiene and avoiding contact with drainage from skin lesions are the best methods for prevention.

Proper prevention and management recommendations may include, but are not limited to:

1. Keep hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and warm water or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer routinely.
2. Encourage immediate showering following activity.
3. Avoid whirlpools or common tubs with open wounds, scrapes or scratches.
4. Avoid sharing towels, razors, and daily athletic gear.
5. Properly wash athletic gear and towels after each use.
6. Maintain clean facilities and equipment.
7. Inform or refer to appropriate health care personnel for all active skin lesions and lesions that do not respond to initial therapy.
8. Administer or seek proper first aid.
9. Encourage health care personnel to seek bacterial cultures to establish a diagnosis.
10. Care and cover skin lesions appropriately before participation.

<sup>1</sup> CA-MRSA Information for the Public. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.  
Available on-line at: <http://www.cdc.gov/mrsa>