

## INFORMATIONAL STATEMENT ON STAPHYLOCOCCAL INFECTIONS

### What is MRSA?

“Staph” is the most common cause of skin infections in our society, however, antibiotic-resistant bacteria (specifically Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus = MRSA) currently pose a significant health threat. Since the summer of 2002, outbreaks of skin infections caused by these bacteria have been reported in sports teams including wrestling, volleyball and most frequently, football.

MRSA strains may not respond to initial treatment and therefore the risk for progression to a more serious disease is greater than with other strains of staph. While the situation is alarming, everyone can help in the effective control and prevention of antibiotic resistant infections.

### Why are MRSA infections showing up in sports?

Those sports with close skin-to-skin contact, such as wrestling, are more likely to have skin infection outbreaks. However, sharing of equipment, poor hygiene, etc. have been identified as a reason for these infections to show up in a variety of athletic environments.

### How does one generally develop a staph infection?

- a. “Self-infection”: Many of us carry staph bacteria in our nose and on our skin, which looks for an opportunity to invade our bodies and multiply enough to produce an infection. Any break in the integrity of the skin, such as a scrape or scratch allows easier entry of these bacteria into our body
- b. Contagiousness: Infection can occur from direct contact with an open wound, especially if you have an open area on your skin as well. It can also develop from exposure to a piece of equipment, a towel or other item that has been contaminated by discharge (i.e. pus, blood) from an infected wound.

### How can one prevent infection from “staph” or MRSA?

Prevention is certainly the best treatment, and early management is helpful not only to the infected individual, but it is also helpful in preventing the spread of infection to teammates.

Some common-sense and effective measures recommended to minimize the risk of skin infection in the athletic environment include:

- a. Good Hygiene!!!
  - Wash hands with soap and water frequently.
  - Keep cuts and abrasions covered during competition and keep them clean with soap and water. If a wound cannot be covered, an athlete should be withheld from activity until seen by a medical professional (certified athletic trainer, school nurse, physician).
  - Avoid contact with other people’s wounds.
  - Do not share dirty clothing, equipment, etc. with others.
  - Limit &/or avoid the sharing of towels during athletic activity.
  - Bathe as soon after practice/games as possible.
  - Early detection, reporting and treatment of skin wounds by players is key to preventing the spread of infection.
- b. Keep Equipment Clean!!!
  - Wash frequently any personal equipment such as football helmets & shoulder pads, wrestling headgear and volleyball knee pads to help prevent “self-infection”.
  - Change athletic clothing/undergarments daily. Do not leave wet, dirty clothes in a locker to incubate until the next wearing.

### How can these infections be treated?

- a. Mild infections will normally clear up with soap and water cleansing and the above mentioned hygiene measures. Topical antibiotic ointments can also be helpful.
- b. More severe localized infections may require antibiotics and even drainage if the infection warrants it.
- c. Consult a doctor if:
  - the infection continues to spread.
  - you develop signs such as fever, red streaks, or a general feeling of illness.
  - the problem doesn’t resolve as expected and more aggressive therapy is possibly required.