Protecting Myself from MRSA
By Angela Ulferts RN, BSN

What is MRSA?
MRSA stands for Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus. This is an infection that has been around for some time. But it has always been associated with persons in the hospital setting or in nursing homes. We are now seeing this outside of these settings, due to over use and misuse of antibiotics.
All of us normally have germs or ‘staph’ bacteria living on our skin and in our noses, usually these cause no harm. However, sometimes they get inside the body through a break in the skin and can cause an infection. These infections can usually be treated with antibiotics. When the usual antibiotics don’t kill the infection, it means the bacteria have become resistant to those antibiotics. Thus we develop MRSA.

Who can get MRSA?
Anyone can get MRSA. You do not need to be an athlete to get this infection. If one person in a family is infected with the MRSA, the rest of the family is at risk of getting it as well. Pets can also get and give you a MRSA infection.

What does MRSA look like?
Most often, MRSA causes infections on the skin. These infections may look like any of the following:
• Sores that look and feel like a spider bite
• Large, red, painful bumps under the skin, ‘boils’
• A cut that is swollen, hot and filled with pus, ‘abscess’
• Blisters filled with fluid, ‘impetigo’
• Turf burn
• Infected skin or wound
These skin infections commonly occur at sites of visible skin trauma, such as cuts and abrasions, and areas of the body covered by hair (back of neck, groin, buttocks, armpit, and beard area of males).
It is also possible to have MRSA in the blood, lungs, eyes and urine. These are less common but more serious, even life threatening.
How do you get MRSA?
Again, *anyone* can get MRSA. You can get MRSA the same way you can get a cold, by touching someone or something that has the bacteria on it and then touching your eyes or your nose. Good hand washing often reduces your chances of getting MRSA. MRSA can live on surfaces and objects for months. It can be killed with proper cleaning methods.

Some ways that you can get MRSA:
- Touching someone’s MRSA infected skin
- Touching surfaces that have MRSA bacteria on them
- Sharing personal hygiene items (soap, towel, wash cloth, razors, athletic equipment, etc.)
- Being in crowded places where germs are easily spread
- Not having the resources to keep clean

You will increase your chances of getting MRSA if:
- You take antibiotics a lot
- Take antibiotics without a prescription
- Don’t follow the prescribed directions (stop taking too early, miss doses, share them with others)
- Recovering from surgery or burns
- Have tubes in your body for medical treatments
- Share needles

How is MRSA treated?
A health care provider should always treat MRSA. It is very important to follow the instructions that you are given. If you have an active infection your provider may choose to treat it in one of three ways:
- Drain the infection. *Do not do this yourself* you could cause the infection to go deeper into your skin and make it worse. Your doctor will make a tiny incision and drain any pus that is there. You must then keep it covered until it heals. You may be asked to come back for a checkup or to change the dressing. Some infections will heal after the pus has been drained. You may or may not be put on an antibiotic.
- Give antibiotics. MRSA’s resistance to many antibiotics makes it hard to treat. Your doctor may culture your infection to test the bacteria to find which antibiotic will work. If you are given an antibiotic take it exactly as prescribed. The last few pills kill the toughest germs.
- Reduce the amount of bacteria on your skin or in your nose. To help decrease the amount of bacteria on your skin the doctor may ask you to shower daily with an antibacterial soap. He may also prescribe an
antibiotic ointment to put in your nose for several days. Again, it will be very important to follow directions exactly.

**How can I protect myself from getting MRSA?**

There is a long list of things that we can all do to help reduce the spread of MRSA infections. We must be very aware of these things and make them lifelong habits if we want to stop the spread of this “super bug”.

- Wash hands thoroughly and often with warm, soapy water for at least 15 seconds, getting between fingers and around nails.
- If soap and water are not available use a 60% alcohol based hand sanitizer, again rub hands for at least 15 seconds.
- Do not poke or squeeze sores.
- Do not touch sores that can’t be covered with a bandage or clothing.
- Cover all wounds with a clean, dry bandage that is taped along all four sides.
- If your sore is leaking, use extra dressings. If you must change them make sure to clean surfaces so that others do not get exposed. Better yet go to the nurses office to do this.
- Wear clothes that will cover the bandage and sore.
- Be very careful if you are around those with weak immune systems, such as newborns the elderly or those with chronic health problems. Also those who have recently had surgery.
- Shower well with soap before and after using a public sauna, hot tub or pool.
- Shower immediately after participating in sports or working out at the gym, or in PE classes.
- Shower immediately after any skin-to-skin contact with another person.
- Wear practice clothes or uniforms only once then wash with soap and hot water (106 degree F minimum) and dry in a hot dryer.
- Avoid contact with other people’s skin infections.
- Do not share personal hygiene items such as bar soap, razors, towels, make up, or clothing. Anything that could come into contact with bare skin.
- No sharing of water bottles.
- Use a barrier, such as a towel, between your skin and the shared equipment.
- Report any skin infections, no matter how small, to coaches, trainers, teachers and school nurse.
• Cover nose and mouth with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. Throw the tissue away and wash your hands.
• Take a bath or shower every day. This will help reduce the amount of bacteria that is on your skin.
• Keep fingernails short to keep bacteria from growing under your nails.
• Change sheets and towels frequently.
• Change your clothing daily and wash them regularly in hot (106 degrees F) soapy water and hot dryer.
• Take care of your skin. Remember, MRSA lives on your skin and any break or crack can allow it to enter and cause an infection. If you do get a cut or scrape, clean the area with soap and water and then cover it with a bandage.
• Take care of yourself by eating right, exercising, avoiding stress, quit smoking and getting the correct amount of sleep each night.
• Get medical care at the first signs of infection, such as redness, swelling, pain and pus.
• Clean and disinfect all shared athletic/sports equipment and surfaces after each use with an EPA approved disinfectant.

Should schools close because of an MRSA infection?
In most cases it is not necessary to close schools because of an MRSA infection in a student. MRSA transmission can be prevented by simple measures such as hand hygiene and covering infections.

Should the school be notified that my child has an MRSA infection?
Yes. It is always a good idea to let the school know if your child has any type of communicable infection or disease. The office will pass this information onto the school nurse. She will consult with the public health department should it be necessary to inform the entire school community of an outbreak. She will be available for district wide information.

Should a student with MRSA be excluded from school?
Unless directed by a physician a student with MRSA infection should not be excluded from school. They must, however, keep their wound covered at all times. If the area cannot be covered, the school nurse will determine if the student needs to be excluded.

Should a student be excused from participation in sports or PE?
Students will be excluded from any and all contact sports or PE that have a draining (pus) wound that cannot be covered and contained with a dry, clean
bandage. This means that if it shows through the dressing or bandage they should not be allowed to take part in the activity. Students who cannot maintain good personal hygiene will also be excluded. Remember, pus from infected wounds can contain staph, including MRSA, so keeping the infection covered will help prevent the spread to others.

**Advice for Teachers**

- Enforce hand hygiene with soap and water or alcohol based hand sanitizers before eating, after using the bathroom, sneezing or blowing their nose.
- If you observe a student with an open wound or infection refer them to the school nurse.
- Encourage good personal hygiene and self-body checks for any unusual signs of possible infections.
- Be available to educate and reinforce school policies.
- Demonstrate good hygiene and hand washing.
- Do not share personnel items with others.
- Enforce students to take PE clothes home at least weekly to be washed.

**Advice for Coaches**

- Enforce hand hygiene with soap and water or alcohol based hand sanitizers before eating, after using the bathroom, sneezing or blowing their nose.
- Do not allow food items in the work out areas.
- If you observe a student with an open wound or infection refer them to the trainer or school nurse.
- Will enforce the need for all sores to be covered *at all times*.
- Encourage your athletes to do a self-body check daily to identify any unusual cuts, bumps, or other spots of possible infections.
- Be available to educate and reinforce school policies.
- Demonstrate good hygiene and hand washing.
- Do not share personal items with others.
- Will assist in disinfecting shared sport items (wrist straps, head gear, belts, etc.).
- Enforce students to take clothes home daily to be washed.

**Advice for Custodians**

- Enforce hand hygiene with soap and water or alcohol based hand sanitizers before eating, after using the bathroom, sneezing or blowing their nose.
• If you observe a student with an open wound or infection refer them to the school nurse.
• Be available to educate and reinforce school policies.
• Demonstrate good hygiene and hand washing.
• Do not share personal items with others.
• Will disinfect locker rooms every Friday. Will mark those lockers that are unable to get into and report to the main office.
• Will disinfect weight room, fitness room, wrestling room and showers daily after practices.

Advice for School Nurses
• Enforce hand hygiene with soap and water or alcohol based hand sanitizers before eating, after using the bathroom, sneezing or blowing their nose.
• The parent/guardian of a student with an open wound or infection will be notified about a possible skin infection and referred to a personnel health care provider.
• Will determine if a student needs to be excluded from school or a sporting event due to an infection.
• Encourage good personal hygiene and self-body checks for any unusual cuts, bumps, or other spots of possible infections.
• Will educate staff, students and community about MRSA and will update school policies as needed.
• Demonstrate good hygiene and hand washing.
• Do not share personal items with others.
• Will use standard universal precautions (gloves) when caring for skin infections.
• Will be in consult with the public health department and the CDC for community wide outbreaks.
• Will provide alcohol based hand sanitizer and dispensers.

Still in the planning stages
• The school will provide towels for students in PE and out for sports.
• The school will launder these towels on a daily basis.
• Dispensers and liquid soap will be provided in all shower areas.
• All sports and PE lockers will be emptied on Friday.
• Custodians will disinfect all PE and sport lockers on Friday evening.
• Posters to be ordered and placed in locker rooms and common areas.
• Program in the works to educate public about MRSA presented by St. Luke’s and Velocity.
• Further district education.
• Article to be run in the CCSD paper.
• Check with other schools and colleges to see what they are doing.
• Do we need to do things outside?
• Do we have the properly approved cleaners?

Thank you for taking the time to read this very important information that will affect us all.
Questions may be directed to Rocky Bennett, Angela Ulferts RN or Duane Carver.

Resources
www.cdc.gov.mrsa
www.idph.state.ia.us
www.jama.com
www.tpchd.org
And you can always do a search for MRSA.
### What is MRSA?

(Methicillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of “Staph” infection</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Often causes skin infections</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resistant to many antibiotics, including penicillin</td>
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### How is MRSA treated?

By a healthcare provider who may:

- Drain the infection *and/or*
- Give an antibiotic *and/or*
- Help reduce the amount of bacteria on the skin

### What does it look like?

- A “spider bite”
- Turf burn
- Abscess
- Boil
- Impetigo
- Infected skin / wound

### How do you get MRSA?

- Touching someone’s MRSA-infected skin
- Touching surfaces that have MRSA on them, like doorknobs & light switches
- Sharing personal hygiene items (bar soap, towels, razors)
- Not having the resources to keep clean
- Overusing antibiotics, stopping them early, or missing doses

### Stop the spread of MRSA!

- **Wash your hands often** with warm, soapy water
- Use 60% alcohol-based hand sanitizer when soap & water are not available
- Shower immediately after practice & matches
- Do not share personal hygiene items (bar soap, towels, razors) or clothing
- Wear practice clothes/uniforms only once, wash with soap & hot water, dry in hot dryer
- Cover all wounds with a clean, dry bandage taped on all four sides
- Avoid contact with other people’s skin infections
- Report skin infections to coach/trainer/nurse
- Clean and disinfect athletic/wrestling gear and practice surfaces (mats, benches, weight lifting equipment) after each use
- Do not let wrestlers practice with potentially contagious wounds, even if covered, and consider use of this rule for all contact sports

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**Help prevent “Staph” infections by not overusing antibiotics**

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Don’t let this happen to you!

Stop the Spread of MRSA

✓ Wash your hands often
✓ Do not touch skin infections
✓ Cover all wounds with a bandage taped on all four sides
✓ Take antibiotics until all gone
✓ Do not share clothing or personal hygiene items
  • make-up
  • deodorant
  • razors
  • bar soap

Report skin infections to your school nurse

MRSA is a type of “Staph” infection resistant to many antibiotics

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Sharing isn’t always caring.

Sharing Personal Items Like Towels, Razors, or Tweezers Can Spread Diseases.

www.cdc.gov/mrsa
Don’t let infection get under your skin.

CUTS AND SCRAPES ARE PART OF THE GAME. TAKE CARE OF THEM PROPERLY.

To avoid skin infections:

• Wash your hands frequently.
• Shower after playing sports; use a clean towel.
• Keep cuts and scrapes clean and covered with a bandage.

Tell your coach or athletic trainer if you think you have a skin infection.

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www.mass.gov/dph
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