



THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Office of School Health

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Dear School Community Member:

If you have heard the recent news about drug-resistant Staph infections, you may be understandably concerned – especially after the recent, tragic death of a 12-year-old child in Brooklyn. We are writing to tell you what you can do to help keep your family healthy, and what the Health Department and Department of Education are doing about the problem.

Staph infections, even resistant Staph infections known as MRSA (Methicillin resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*), are very common, usually minor, and can be cured. More than 20% of healthy people have Staph bacteria on their skin and will never get any illness from them; less than 1% of healthy people carry MRSA. The most common symptoms, if any, are skin sores. Staph and MRSA infections can be spread by skin-to-skin contact with an open wound or by sharing personal items such as towels or razors. Although MRSA is resistant to some antibiotics, there are other antibiotics that can be used if treatment is necessary.

MRSA is a serious problem in hospitals, where it can spread rapidly. On the other hand, life-threatening infections are extremely rare in our schools. Although hundreds of schoolchildren and staff develop these infections every year, very, very few develop serious complications. Spread of the infection within schools is rare and has been documented mainly among sports teams, e.g. wrestling, who have direct physical contact.

MRSA does not generally spread through a shared environment such as a classroom. It is not necessary to keep a student home from school, or to close the school, if a student has a Staph or MRSA infection. There is no health-based reason to disinfect a school building after a single case is diagnosed.

To reduce further risk, we are redoubling efforts to ensure that school bathrooms are equipped with soap and paper towels. We will also work to promote good hygiene in sports teams and locker rooms, and to increase education about hand-washing. We have also ensured that our cleaning procedures are effective against MRSA and other germs. When evidence suggests risk of spread within a school, the Health Department will notify your principal and work with the school to address the issue.

Here are some things you and your children can do:

1. Keep hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap or an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
2. Avoid sharing personal items such as towels or razors.
3. Keep cuts and scrapes clean and, during school activities, covered with a bandage.
4. Consult your doctor if you're concerned about a skin infection that isn't getting better.

Staph infections, even MRSA infections, are not a general health risk in schools. If you have questions, please contact your Parent Coordinator or 311.

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