



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

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MRSA: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is a Staph Infection?

A Staph infection is a bacterial infection that usually affects the skin. The Staph germ is extremely common – 20% of us have it on our skin or in our nasal passages – and it is not normally dangerous for healthy people. A Staph infection looks like a pimple or boil on the skin. It may be red, swollen, painful, or have pus, but it normally heals without any treatment other than a clean bandage. Despite the recent tragedy at IS-211, the Health Department does not believe that other children are at increased risk for the infection. The Department of Education has disinfected common areas of the school as a precaution, but building surfaces are not likely to harbor Staph bacteria. Parents should not worry about their children becoming infected in classroom settings.

What is a MRSA?

MRSA (methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*) is a type of Staph infection that show resistance to some commonly used antibiotics, but is easily treated in nearly all cases. Media reports often refer to it as a “superbug,” but the infection is no more serious than ordinary Staph.

Is MRSA treatable?

Staph infections, including MRSA, rarely require any medical treatment. If skin lesions are drained, cleaned and covered, they typically heal by themselves. If a skin lesion doesn't heal by itself, a doctor may use antibiotics to treat it. MRSA requires different medication than other types of Staph, but it is almost always treatable in healthy people. If antibiotics are needed, it is very important to use the medication exactly as directed by the doctor.

How does MRSA spread?

MRSA usually spreads through direct contact skin-to-skin contact with wounds or by sharing personal items. The best way to prevent infections and protect your child is to encourage good hand-washing and discourage the sharing of personal items such as towels, razors and lipstick. In a school setting, MRSA is most commonly spread between athletes, such as wrestlers, who come into direct physical contact. It does not generally spread among students in a classroom setting. Even if a student has a Staph infection, the wound can be covered with a bandage to protect others, so it not necessary to keep them out of school or close the school.

Who is at risk for MRSA?

Serious complications from MRSA are extremely rare in healthy people. Nearly 9 out of 10 serious cases occur in hospitals or other health care settings, such as nursing homes and dialysis centers, where patients' many health problems make it harder for them to fight off the infection.

Can students and staff with MRSA attend school?

Yes, as long as the wound is covered and they are receiving proper treatment. Students and staff do not need to be isolated or sent home if a suspected Staph or MRSA infection is noticed. Wash the area with soap and water and cover it with a clean, dry bandage. Anyone who touches the wound should wash their hands immediately, and the wound should be kept covered with a dressing or bandage until it has dried completely.

What special precautions should sports teams take?

- Players should not share personal items, such as towels, bar soap and razors. They should also avoid sharing of equipment that is in direct contact with skin. School staff should clean shared equipment after each use, using an approved disinfectant.
- Players should shower immediately after practice and matches. If players bring their own towels, they should take them home to be washed after each use.
- Players should not wait until they get home to treat their skin injuries. Players, parents and coaches should monitor wounds closely for signs of infection (redness, pain, swelling and pus). During games and practices skin wounds should be covered with a clean, dry bandage. Wounds should otherwise be kept clean, dry and left open to air to facilitate healing.
- Players should avoid body shaving.
- Schools should routinely use an effective disinfectant to clean all surfaces that come into direct contact with skin – especially surfaces and floors in bathrooms, locker rooms, showers. These surfaces should be cleaned daily, and immediately if soiled.

How can I protect myself from MRSA?

Some of the best ways to keep from getting or spreading the infection include:

- Wash hands frequently and thoroughly.
- Don't share personal items such as towels or razors.
- Cover cuts and scrapes with a clean bandage.
- Don't touch other people's wounds or bandages.
- Wipe down surfaces you come into contact with at the gym or in a locker room.

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