

MRSA: How does it relate to athletics? (Fall 2007 NFHS Coaches' Quarterly)

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What is MRSA?

Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus (MRSA) is an advanced strain of a "staph" infection that is resistant to antibiotics such as methicillin, penicillin, amoxicillin and oxacillin. Some people refer to it as the "Super Bug."

There are two types of MRSA:

1. HA-MRSA, which is hospital associated, usually affects individuals with a compromised immune system.
2. CA-MRSA is community associated and can affect healthy individuals. Athletes, coaches and athletic trainers can become infected and, therefore, prevention should be a key focus.

How Do You Get it and What is the Treatment?

Common bacteria live on our skin. In fact, many people are carriers of "staph" but don't know it because they never have a staph infection. The problem starts when this "staph" bacteria find their way into the body through an open wound. This occurs either through direct contact of a person who is a carrier or by touching an object that has the bacteria.

The site of the wound becomes infected, showing signs of swelling, warmth, redness, puss-like pimple or boil. This time, immediate referral to your doctor is vital. Here, the infected area may be drained, a sample will be taken to be cultured and further evaluated. The doctor then may prescribe a course of antibiotics such as bactrim and vancocin. As with all antibiotics, it is important that individuals complete all medications prescribed by their doctor and also should not resume practice/competition until the lesions are adequately healed.

"Prevention" - What Steps Can I Take Now?

- Wash your hands often using an antimicrobial, antiseptic skin cleanser such as Hibiclens® (sing "Happy Birthday twice" or the CDC recommends saying the alphabet once).
- Shower immediately after every practice and game.
- Wash athletic clothes daily in hot water and dry on a hot setting.
- Cover all open cuts prior to practice and game activity.
- Do not share items such as clothing, towels, soap, razors, water bottles.

Additional steps that can and should be taken in the athletic setting:

- Use an antiseptic, antibacterial solution to routinely wipe down athletic equipment such as gymnastics and wrestling mats, and headgear of any type.
- Wipe down treatment tables and weight equipment between athletes.
- Wear barriers such as non-latex gloves when treating open wounds.

Conclusion

Germs are all around us and simply put "An Ounce of Prevention is Worth a Pound of Cure." So, reinforce to your athletes and athletic department that everyone should practice good daily hygiene!